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RADICAL CHAINS

«COMMUNIST ANTICIPATIONS»

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"...the formation of a class with **radical chains**...a class which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere which has a universal character because of its universal suffering and which lays claim to no particular right because the wrong it suffers is not a particular wrong but wrong in general...and finally a sphere which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from - and thereby emancipating - all the other spheres of society, which is, in a word, the total loss of humanity and which can therefore redeem itself only through the total redemption of humanity. This dissolution of society as a particular class is the proletariat."

KARL MARX

The Myth
of
Working Class Passivity

Pannekoek and the Transition

Guy Aldred's
"Trade Unionism and the Class War"
(1911)

Walter Benjamin

Reviews

STATEMENT OF INTENT

The working class is bound by radical chains: it experiences suffering and dehumanisation of global significance, yet - because of this - develops capacities and needs which call for the supersession of class society. This "greatest of all the productive forces" demands conditions adequate to itself, and is self-driven to bring them into being, ie to abolish itself as the working class. Communism is thus not merely an idea. It is a human need, embodied in the historical presence of combined propertyless labour power.

Communism is freely associating people creating themselves through conscious social planning. Communism is the living potential against which the alienated categories and experiences of the present make human sense.

The world in which we live is riven by a contradiction between the latent law of planning and the law of value. Within the transitional epoch as a whole these correspond to the needs of the proletariat and those of capital, which remain the polarities of class relationships across the earth.

Yet this characterisation can only be a starting point. The unresolved contradiction between the law of value and the law of planning concerns relationships within the material world. The law of planning has not superseded the law of value, and is not doing so. Administration, by bureaucracies and elites, functions in a variety of forms as a surrogate for planning in the absence of the real thing. These centralised, top-down attempts to coordinate the activities of the direct producers and adjacent social strata must fail, even on their own terms, for they are properly subject neither to the discipline of the market nor to that of the consciously associating society. In the presence of combined labour, containment and external coordination of an administrative nature can only be partial, unstable, and unsuccessful. There cannot be planning except by the producers.

Marx's method was developed in the period of ascendant capitalism. It remains the foundation of revolutionary thought and action in the current epoch. Yet marxism's potential remains unrealised: the containment of October was primarily achieved before October, internationally, through bourgeois administrative responses to the proletariat in Britain, Germany, and elsewhere. The USSR was transformed into a centre of reaction penetrating the world labour movement.

For more than half a century stalinism has partnered social democracy as the main obstacles to proletarian self-transformation on a world scale. In fact, the bogus claims made for Soviet "planning" gave social democracy a new lease of life by appearing to vindicate the rationality and viability of centralised administration. By virtue of its origins in the destruction of October, stalinism has been able to bring marxism into disrepute. It is corrupted marxism which has become something else whilst seeking communist credentials, and being granted them by the political representatives of capital.

The problem today is even more serious than that of the years following 1848 when the revolutionary party, as Marx observed, was "driven from the field" by the industrial and commercial recovery. Not only are we surrounded by the debris of October. The working corollary of this is that in

different national locations the working class is obstructed by often symbiotic mass stalinist and social democratic "workers parties" and social structures which are barriers to proletarian self-development. Even worse, there exist small but politically significant groupings which have internalised - with whatever reservations - key aspects of the stalinist ideological legacy: notably the crippling assertion that the USSR and similar entities are transitional societies. Stalinism is too often narrowly and misleadingly seen as a primarily political degeneration.

The core of historical materialism is the analysis of social forms of surplus extraction and labour process control from the standpoint of communism. Stalinism may for a time suspend the law of value as a means of economic regulation, but without bringing about a move towards planning, which can only be conscious, democratic and global. Social democracy does the same in more partial ways, where capital remains the direct form of surplus extraction. Imposing limits upon the law of value only preserves it. During an entire historical period the prevention of communism has been, and remains, for capital, the pressing requirement, even where the resulting social forms are barriers to the self-expansion of capital.

Radical Chains exists in order to develop revolutionary critique. The task which we have set ourselves is both prosaic and difficult. Radical Chains seeks to carve out a theoretical space within which the need for and movement towards human emancipation can be explored. Our work involves no more and no less than the mapping out of the contours of the theory which, as communists, we know to be essential for the regeneration of a conscious movement for communism.

This objective requires the re-evaluation of key categories and concepts which have previously been debated. This does not simply necessitate a project of recovery, but an attempt to forge new categories and concepts appropriate to our own period. As such this statement of intent constitutes a common point of departure rather than a collective conclusion.

We are not a party, nor even the nucleus of one. Our immediate concern is with a milieu, not a party, though we aim to develop as a contributing strand towards a future formation: we take politics too seriously to chain ourselves to a grandiose set of initials. The revolutionary party of the proletariat will not come into being without a revolutionary movement in the working class. In the meantime, the closest available approximation to such a party necessarily takes the form of dispersed individuals and groups, of which Radical Chains is one. To declare a premature political party nucleus without undertaking a clear and uncompromising struggle to recognize the complexity of the prevention of communism is to create yet another barrier against proletarian self-formation, and to perpetuate the dispersal.

A period of deepening decay and disruption is beginning and the only "new realism" worth considering is one which takes its bearings from the need for free association and the potential for abundance. It is necessary to ruthlessly confront the failure of all limiting "feasible socialisms". Both past and future as well as the agony of the present demand this.

CONTENTS

Statement of Intent	2
Editorial	3
The Myth of Working Class Passivity - Commodity Fetishism, Class Formation and Proletarian Self-Emancipation	4
Prison Reform	11
Anton Pannekoek and the Theory of the Transition	12
The Street	20-21
Reprint: Trade Unionism and the Class War + Introduction to Aldred	24
Book Reviews	32
Obituary, Conference Reviews	35
Our Back Pages: Walter Benjamin	40



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We invite contributions addressing themes outlined in the statement of intent. Radical Chains will include articles with which we are not in full agreement and welcomes debate.

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We are confronted by the reality of collapse - of the post-war welfare consensus, of the soviet bloc, of the cold war. All the systems that had assured stability for accumulation; all collapsing. Collapse also of the left itself, a left which has in one way or another been implicated in the various forms, especially administrative, set up over the working class. As that world changes, the left falls apart, its purpose questioned.

The gulf crisis appears to offer the left salvation through submersion in a classic issue: opposition to war. The issues seem clear enough; the usual analysis stands on some form of anti-imperialism. Capitalism, it can be argued, has declined into an imperialist system of rivalrous powers compelled by falling profits ultimately to go to war over the division of the world. These imperialist powers are the reactionary custodians of decline and their defeat would weaken the forces opposing the proletariat. Anti-imperialism can thus recognise and support progressive forces that are not necessarily the proletariat, in so far as they weaken imperialism. All this amounts to a powerful argument which should not be dropped without serious debate.

The logic of the argument should lead to the slogan "Victory to Iraq!" This latter power, distinguished by its subordinate role, becomes the objectively progressive power that helps to crack imperialism. The position is implicit in the left's response but it has preferred the less contentious anti-war position of "Hands off the Gulf!", etc.

There is no question about opposing war. The real question is whether the old arguments are adequate or need to be re-examined. This is particularly important in light of changes since 1916. The most vital of these, and one which has been inadequately theorised, is the development of the working class in areas carelessly referred to as the "third world". Solidarity of workers internationally has a considerably wider basis than in Lenin's day. In Iraq itself, the 1958 revolution marked a decisive appearance of the proletariat quite impossible in Lenin's time. Despite apparent ideological differences, Iraq and Iran have much in common: they are founded on the containment of proletarian revolution. This in itself gives us reason to doubt whether an Iraqi victory would constitute a weakening of the imperialist system.

Military victory, eg by the USA, does not directly translate into social victory. It may solve one set of problems by dragging the USA deeper into others. Defeat of Hussein may in fact provoke a yet more radical opposition within the regime.

Saddam Hussein has played an important role for the USA, in a way similar to other rulers. Victory over Hussein would simply require another USA slogan "Long Live Saddam Hussein!" The USA needs somehow to engineer limited gains for Hussein compatible with the USA appearing to remain

the boss power.

The situation is complicated by the collapse of the cold war. Its role as protector of the West having gone, the USA finds in the Gulf crisis the chance to reassert its supremacy. This becomes more important given the uncertainty of economic news and the potential for breakdown into trade wars hinted at in the faltering world trade talks (the GATT Uruguay round).

The crisis might appear to offer the USA an opportunity to resolve conflicts between the major nations in its own favour. This, however, is to ignore the power of the Hussein regime. Iraq is no push-over and war would have a devastating impact on the USA (as the USA itself recognises). Even if working class opposition does not prevent war, it will certainly react to its results, whether this means victory of defeat. A further complicating factor in this, is increasingly ideological uncertainty. We are approaching the "Age of the Two Headless Chickens": a right losing its ideological thread, and a left that either pushes out the old lies or accommodates to the market.

It cannot be predicted whether the USA will go to war. It needs an escalation of threats to convince Hussein that it does mean war, in order to get his peaceful withdrawal. But there is little reason to believe that Hussein will come to the rescue. He must by now be aware that the expected military and domestic political costs are so great that force as an option is scarcely even a last resort. This leaves the USA in a near impossible situation.

In analysing crises of this nature the left has tended, since at least the 1930s, to have been paralysed at the political level. Disclosed by a linear notion of transition, this paralysis has allowed a blurring of the distinction between the communist project and "progress". In the name of "progress" the left has supported one repressive regime after another. From the early years of the Comintern, support for "progressive" forces has continually subordinated the proletariat to alien interests. For the working class, typically, the results have been murderous.

This perspective found its highest expression in the characterisation of the USSR as some variety of workers' state despite the total absence of any collective forms of the working class. Thus the left has held up an objectivity separated from and actually opposed to the historical subjectivity of the working class.

The ruling class has everywhere preferred progress to communism. Progress itself is a project that has evolved from the need of the bourgeoisie to delay communism. The left, for its part, after years of popular frontism and accommodation to administrative control, has lost the perspective of communism and recognition of the practical need for the supersession of exchange mediation.

The wider context of the fate of the left must affect our attitude to the gulf. The

crisis helps submerge the crisis of the left. It offers the left a spectacular diversion, one that can solidarise its members by pressing upon them the urgency of the immediate situation. A whole train of immediate situations have, in favour of organisational priorities, subverted themes of greater relevance. Regeneration of the left requires retrieval of the communist perspective.

Towards this aim Radical Chains welcomes its first article in this issue, by David Gorman. This takes up an apparent contradiction between commodity fetishism and proletarian emancipation. Gorman identifies an element in left thinking that has been replicated unchallenged, and often unstated: the assumption of the passivity of the working class. Failing to advance its political economy to the present period, the left has collapsed commodity fetishism and What Is To Be Done? into a surrogate for analysis. Against this crucial aspect of the left's loss of a communist perspective, Gorman poses the material process of class formation.

Our second article, by Bob Shepherd, on Anton Pannekoek's theory of transition, also contributes to this project of retrieval. Pannekoek, Shepherd argues, founded his analysis on the point of view of the class as it emerged within the developing social situation of Germany pre- and post-WW I. Pannekoek could thus observe that the workers' own struggle needed continuously to break down regimes and forms resulting from previous struggles. This gave him a powerful analysis of opportunism and enabled him to perceive the dangers of mere representation of the working class. His understanding of communism as rupture allowed him to comprehend the period of transition as one of discontinuity. This is usefully contrasted with Lenin's belief that it was enough to "cross out" the words "Junker-bourgeois imperialism" from his description of German large-scale engineering and planned economy and replace it with a soviet state. This latter has helped foster linear notions of transition.

As usual we also present features covering aspects of the history of the left. We welcome a report by Baruch Hiron on a conference called on the 50th anniversary of the murder of Leon Trotsky by a GPU agent. Here Hiron wryly records the different uses to which Trotsky is being put. In addition we have as our reprint an article by Guy Aldred on trade unions and the class struggle. This first appeared in 1911 at the height of labour discontent, dominated by syndicalism, but takes a critical attitude to trade unions, seeing them as having evolved into a bulwark of the system. We must also remember the sad death of Walter Benjamin. David Officer on 'Our Back Pages' gives us a summary of Benjamin's life as he struggled intellectually to become a marxist, and records his tragic suicide in nazi occupied Europe.

William Dixon,

The Myth of Working Class Passivity :

Commodity Fetishism, Class Formation and Proletarian Self-Emancipation.

In the enchanted world of capital the emancipation of the working class can only be won by the working class itself. To say this, however, is to make assumptions and raise questions about the relations between consciousness and ideology, theory and practice, class and party, and about the nature of the transition to communism itself. These questions have often been approached through the theory of fetishism and, at its most extreme, this theory has been appropriated in such a way as to be posited as an absolute barrier to consciousness and so, by implication, to self-emancipation. This form of its appropriation is however erroneous. There is, in fact, no inconsistency between the theory of fetishism and the principles of proletarian self-emancipation.

To show this, however, it is first necessary to outline the nature of the assumptions underlying the notion that fetishism is an absolute barrier to consciousness. These assumptions, it will be argued, involve the abstraction of consciousness from the rest of social reality and more fundamentally, the assumption of working class passivity. This is followed by a close reading of Marx which attempts to specify the wider context of which the theory of fetishism is a part. This matrix, it is argued, includes not just the law of value but the embryonic law of planning and the self-formation of the working class through the conscious determination of needs. Finally, it is necessary to look at the events since the death of Marx which appear to contradict this analysis. By locating these phenomena within the political economy of the prevention of communism (David Binns & William Dixon, *Radical Chains* 1:1) it is possible to avoid the conclusion of working class passivity in the face of bourgeois ideology.

It should be stressed that what follows is not offered as a definitive answer to these questions. For one thing, it fails to take up the phenomenon of credit and inflation discussed by Lipietz for example (see his *The Enchanted World: Inflation, Credit and World Crisis*, Verso 1985). For another, although the analysis outlined here has implications for questions of organisation these are not drawn out. Finally, little is said about the evolution of Marx's own thought on the subject. It is hoped that these issues will be taken up at a later date.

Abstraction and Passivity

The core of the theory of fetishism - to give an initial characterisation - is that under capitalism social labour cannot appear as

social labour but only in the form of the exchange of objects as equivalents. This has implications for the nature of bourgeois ideology. Contemporary discussions of fetishism tend to draw out these implications. The focus is on two interrelated features of bourgeois ideological forms. First, in such economies, social relations appear in the form of (or are confused with) things. Second, what is social and historical appears to be (or is taken to be) natural and eternal. It is because social relations appear in the form of things (or are taken to be things), that capitalist social relations appear to be (or are taken to be) natural. Commodity fetishism is then, presented as the basis of ideological mystification in bourgeois society.

It can hardly be said that there has been an extensive debate on the subject. However, in contemporary discussions of fetishism two apparently opposed interpretations can be discerned which might be thought to imply very different political strategies. On the one hand, "objectivists" such as Slaughter stress that fetishism can be removed only in the practical solution of the material conditions which give rise to it. On the other hand, "subjectivists" such as Ollman suggest that fetishism is an intellectual error amenable to correction by intellectual means alone. In fact, these apparently opposed positions converge and their convergence can be traced back to shared assumptions about the nature of the working class. Slaughter and Ollman are cited only as representatives of two apparently opposed understandings of fetishism common on the left.

An example of the "objectivist" account can be found in Slaughter, according to whom: "By 'commodity fetishism' Marx means the 'objective' appearances of the social characteristics of labour'. In other words, men's own mutual relations appear to them in the form of the set characteristics of material objects, the products of their own labour" (Cliff Slaughter, *Marxism and the Class Struggle*, New Park, 1975). This conception of fetishism, Slaughter argues, stresses "the actual oppression of the producers by the system of capitalist production, and not just the distortion of their class consciousness" (ibid). Fetishism is for Slaughter, a question of domination as well as of mystification. But the question of mystification is important too, for Slaughter holds that it is the objective appearances of bourgeois society which trap workers within the limitations of "trade union consciousness" (ibid). Class struggle, in this conception becomes reduced to a struggle between bourgeois ideology and marxist theory for hegemony over the consciousness

of the working class: "even though the mass of workers experience exploitation, it is necessary for a struggle to take place between their existing consciousness on the one hand, and Marxism on the other" (ibid). "Consciousness", in the form of marxist theory, must, Slaughter argues, therefore be brought to the workers "from outside".

An example of the apparently opposed view - the "subjectivist" account - can be found in Ollman. The theory of commodity fetishism here "refers to people's misconception of the products of labour once they enter exchange, a misconception which accords these forms of value leading roles in what is still a human drama" (Bertell Ollman, *Alienation*, Cambridge 1971). Workers experience exploitation, but in the course of this experience, "are prone to confuse the means with the people who direct them, and to attribute to inanimate objects the social character of an exploiting agency" (ibid). By conceiving of means of production as means of exploitation, Ollman argues, workers grant them the power to exploit. Workers find their inclinations in conflict with the demands of a particular situation but "they consistently misunderstand and are incapable of responding to it in ways that would promote their interests" (ibid).

Elsewhere Ollman spells out the political implications more fully, although he makes no explicit reference to the theory of fetishism. Conditions have been ripe for communism since 1848: "If it was not conditions which failed Marx, it must have been the working class" (Bertell Ollman, *Social and Sexual Revolution*, Pluto, 1979). The task for socialists is, therefore education. Workers aged much over forty are effectively lost for revolution and socialists must focus their efforts on "teenage and even younger members of the working class" (ibid). The task is "to help alter the character structure of the next generation of workers" (ibid). Ollman's strategy for social revolution finds its highest expression in his board game *Class Struggle*.

"Objectivists" and "subjectivists" tend to converge in abstracting consciousness from, and counterposing it to, the rest of social reality. This necessarily creates the need to deliver "consciousness" to the workers. The project must, however, strike a reef. If fetishism is a barrier to workers' consciousness, it must also be a barrier to the consciousness of the revolutionary intelligentsia. The educators must themselves

be educated. Two possibilities follow. Either there is no need to bring consciousness to the workers or it is impossible. The "solution" to the problem is a pseudo-solution and this is because the problem, as set up, is insoluble.

In fact the problem is itself a pseudo-problem. Underlying the abstraction of consciousness from the rest of social reality is the assumption - not necessarily consciously held - that the working class is essentially passive. While workers may struggle against this or that aspect of capitalism, it is assumed they never struggle against the whole. Their struggles therefore have no impact upon the social structure and so have no tendency towards communism. This supposed passivity has to be explained and the explanation has been in terms of ideology or commodity fetishism. Fetishism is an objective aspect of the social production of commodities but when the working class is assumed to be passive the question of whether fetishism is "objective" or "subjective" loses its significance. Whether fetishism is understood to be "objective" or "subjective" is secondary to the assumption of working class passivity.

The Fascination of "What is to be Done?"

It is necessary to understand the terms of reference within which such a conclusion might be reached. The principle work to be examined in this context is *What Is To Be Done?* This text, written in 1902, provides a particular "model" of the relations between class and party and between consciousness and ideology to which the assumption of working class passivity is central. Even those who reject or oppose "leninism" have often taken on board the assumption of working class passivity. *What Is To Be Done?* has become a perennial source of fascination for the left. This is because it appears to address contemporary concerns. Some of its assumptions have become a taken-for-granted frame of reference within which the left moves; they have indeed passed into the "common-sense" of the left.

The central concern of *What is to be Done?* is the supposed containment of the working class within the "economic struggle", through which, with the help of socialist agitation, workers learn to "sell their commodity on better terms and to fight their employers over a purely commercial deal" (WITBD). This "containment" is attributed to the influence of bourgeois ideology: "The working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism, but the more widespread (and continually revived in the most diverse forms) bourgeois ideology nevertheless, spontaneously imposes itself still more" (Ibid).

To be freed of the influence of bourgeois ideology workers must acquire knowledge of the totality of bourgeois social relations: "Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is only from outside of the economic struggle, from outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships between all the classes and strata and the state

and the government, the sphere of the inter-relationships between all the classes" (Ibid).

Because the influence of bourgeois ideology is so strong, the knowledge necessary for revolutionary change and indeed socialist consciousness itself, can only be "brought to" the working class "from without". The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, is the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals" (Ibid).



A number of criticisms can be made. First, the category of the "economic struggle" corresponds to no known social reality. Even the struggle over the length of the working day in the nineteenth century threw capital into crisis, necessitating the transition to another form of capital accumulation. Secondly, if history "shows" anything, it is that workers are quite capable of going beyond "trade union consciousness". 1848 and 1871 are examples - ones of which Lenin should have been aware. Indeed the experience of 1905 led Lenin to distance himself, if ambiguously, from some of his formulations about working class consciousness. Finally, if the strength of bourgeois ideology is such that it "spontaneously" imposes itself on the working class, it must "spontaneously" impose itself on the educators too. Again, the project of bringing consciousness to the workers "from the outside" is either unnecessary or impossible.

The most important point, however, concerns the abstraction of consciousness and ideology from political economy. *What is to be Done?* might be a response to a real problem. Although it effectively deals with only the surface phenomenon, it deals with them in such a way that it has been able to pass into the common sense of the left as a set of taken-for-granted assumptions. These assumptions have become so ingrained that

they are often read into Marx's discussion of commodity fetishism. In turn, the theory of fetishism is used to explain the phenomena observed in *What Is To Be Done?* One commentator has put it; "The classical expression of the Marxist theory of revolutionary organisation, Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?*, was not written primarily as a theory of ideology as such, and Lenin does not explicitly account for the dominance of bourgeois ideology in trade-union consciousness in terms of the political economy of capitalist society. Nevertheless, his conception of a 'trained organisation of revolutionaries capable of maintaining the energy, stability and continuity of the revolutionary struggle, derives its rationale from the 'fetishism of commodities' in capitalist society" (David Binns, *Beyond the Sociology of Conflict*, Macmillan 1977). It is

assumed that in the discussion of fetishism in 'Capital' and elsewhere Marx is concerned to understand the supposed passivity of the working class. Commodity fetishism then becomes the explanation for this supposed passivity. In fact, however, Marx is not concerned with working class passivity but with its self-activity.

Standing Marx on his Feet: Class Consciousness and Class Formation

This concern with the self-activity of the working class is brought out clearly in Marx's analysis of the process of class formation. This is the process by which living labour overcomes the its social atomisation and constitutes itself as a social force capable of organising production in accordance with consciously determined need. It is a process of political economy with an inherent tendency towards communism. It is out of this process that class consciousness develops. The analysis of class formation first appears in the *Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) and *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). It re-appears in Marx's "later" writings in a more developed form.

For Marx, the subordination of living labour to capital is not given, but is conditioned by the struggle of the working class. In the

course of this struggle, which is at 'once economic and political' - as in the Chartist movement, for example - the working class develops itself as a social force. The atomisation resulting from the competition over the sale of labour power and from the power of capital forces workers to combine to maintain their wages. In so doing they both eliminate competition among themselves and unite against their employers. In time, and especially with the experience of capitalist repression, the maintenance of combination becomes more important than the maintenance of wages. Combinations then become permanent associations, towards the preservation of which wages might often be sacrificed.

A form of self organisation developed for one purpose takes on new functions. Indeed for Marx the formation of combinations is part of the process of the formation of the class itself - not merely something workers do, but an active expression of the developing social being of the proletariat. In the place of a multitude of atomised individuals, stand networks of conscious association. Hence Marx speaks of "strikes, combinations and other forms in which the proletarians carry out before their own eyes their organisation as a class" (*Poverty of Philosophy*).

Consciousness grows out of the struggles of the workers themselves. In the course of this struggle the proletariat is joined by intellectuals "who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole" (*Communist Manifesto*). The "theoretical conclusions" of these intellectuals "are in no way based on ideas or principles invented, or discovered by, this or that would-be reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from an historical movement going on under their very eyes" (*Ibid*). Theory is descriptive and explanatory rather than prescriptive. It draws out, generalises or makes explicit what is already implied by the conscious struggle and organisation of workers themselves. The emphasis is on the self-activity of the working class. Indeed, in contrast to *What is to be Done?*, in which the working class is activated from the outside, Marx argues that revolutionary intellectuals join the working class only "in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour" (*Ibid*).

Reading Marx Carefully: Class Formation and Commodity Fetishism

Marx's concern with the self-activity of the working class and the process of class formation is not restricted to the *Poverty of Philosophy* and *The Communist Manifesto*; it runs through the discussions of fetishism in *Capital* and elsewhere. This, however, has been obscured by the influence of the assumptions embodied in *What Is To Be Done?* The best accounts of fetishism have pointed to the organic connection between fetishism and the law of value. In doing so, they have specified only one part of the matrix within which the theory of fetishism is embedded. The theory of fetishism constitutes part of a totality which includes not only the

law of value but also the law of planning. The law of planning is the basis for working class self-formation and it is this process of class formation which undermines the material basis of commodity fetishism: the law of value. In Marx, the theory of fetishism is developed in connection with an account of class formation. Commodity fetishism is not the explanation of working class "passivity", but is actively undermined in the process of working class self-formation. *Capital* has been read, re-read, and read politically, and yet this point remains unacknowledged.

The theory of commodity fetishism refers to the inverted appearances of the social forms and relations of bourgeois commodity production and of the forces and relations of its dissolution and supervision. For Marx, fetishism is not static or unchanging but



intensifies with the development of the capital form itself. Capital, however, is the social relation between capital and wage labour. It is, therefore, a relation of exploitation and of struggle. It develops through different forms and, as it changes, its fetishised forms of appearance change also. In changing, they are both intensified and suspended. This is both the result of the process of class formation and a ground of its possibility.

This side of Marx's account is easily missed. Often the key points are implied rather than stated explicitly and have therefore to be drawn out. Sometimes they take the form of apparently off-the-cuff remarks and throw-away statements, the real significance of which is unclear. This may seem odd, but this is to forget two things: First, Marx could take class struggle and class formation for granted and could not have foreseen its being deflected by the forms of the prevention of communism. Second, he could not have foreseen the ways in which the theory of fetishism would be re-interpreted in light of the prevention of communism.

Under conditions of commodity production, Marx argues, commodities exchange at their values, i.e. in accordance with the labour socially necessary for their production. The production of commodities presupposes an atomised society of independent producers who produce solely for exchange, their activities being regulated neither by custom nor by conscious planning, but by the requirement that no more labour than is socially necessary shall be expended in production. The law of value regulates the social existence of the producers through

competition, but this appears to the participants only in the form of the movement of prices. Social relations are not fixed but created anew with every act of exchange. The social existence of individuals is precarious because they cannot know in advance whether their labour is socially necessary.

Through money the social connections between atomised individuals are facilitated. Labour power, abstracted from and indifferent to any specific end, becomes measurable and its measurability exists in the form of money as universal equivalent. This abstract labour is the substance of value yet value appears as a property of things. Products appear to exchange on the market in accordance with natural laws. The social basis of exchange, abstract labour, does not appear. Because individual labour is mediated by exchange, "the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations, between people at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things" (*Capital* vol I).

Universal exchange requires the existence of the universal equivalent: money. Because of its physical divisibility, gold is well suited for this function. Its money-form is not an intrinsic property of gold, "but is merely the form under which certain social relations manifest themselves" (*Capital* vol I). Gold becomes money because all other commodities have come to express their values in it. But the actual process appears in inverted form: it appears that "all other commodities express their values in gold, because it is money" (*Ibid*). In money, "a social relation, a definite relation between individuals, here appears as a metal, a stone, a purely physical, external thing, which can be found, as such, in nature, and whom is indistinguishable from its natural existence" (*Grundrisse*, 1858, p 234). This is what Marx calls "the magic of money" (*Capital* vol I).



Because of their essential role in mediating social relations, things take on a life of their own, and this, Marx argues, is best understood by analogy with religion. (This analogy is, however, generally misunderstood). In the religious world, "the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relations both with one another and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands" (Capital vol I). In religion, ideas appear as independent living beings. In ancient Greek religion and mythology, for example, the concept of "wisdom" becomes personified by the goddess Athena and in this form enters into relations with other such beings, Zeus, for example, and with human beings, such as Odysseus. In the world of commodities, Marx argues, the products of human labour appear as autonomous entities with a life and will of their own, and which enter into relations with each other and with humanity. Commodities exchange in quantities which vary independently of the will of their producers. To the producers therefore, "their own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rules the producers instead of being ruled by them" (Capital vol I).

Commodity fetishism is "inseparable from the production of commodities" (ibid). Society, moreover, "does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan" (ibid). But fetishism is not static but intensifies with the development of the capital form itself. Thus, Marx argues, the fetishes associated with the commodity and money are common in all societies in which these forms appear, but with the emergence of the capital form as the dominant form of production, "this perverted and enchanted world develops still more" (Capital vol III, 1894).

In pre-capitalist societies fetishism developed only in relation to money and "interest-bearing capital" (Capital vol III). The basic relations of pre-capitalist society were not, however, subject to fetishism. These relations were direct, based on production for use, not exchange. Under relations of "personal dependence" (Grundrisse, p158) the fact of exploitation is evident: the reality of unpaid surplus labour being entirely visible. In the transition to capitalism, however, relations of personal dependence come to be increasingly suspended by relations of personal independence "founded on objective (sachlicher) dependence" (ibid p158). Abstract labour, which existed only in embryo in previous societies, is, in the course of this transition, developed to its fullest form through the forced separation of labour from the conditions of labour. Through the creation of absolute poverty in which money exists in opposition to labour power as a commodity, the universalisation of the commodity form becomes possible. With this universalisation of commodity production, fetishism is universalised and intensified.

In the early stages of capitalist production, however, where the extraction of absolute

surplus value predominates, the capital-labour relationship is "still very simple and the actual connection impresses itself upon the bearers of this process, the capitalists themselves, and remains in their consciousness. The violent struggle over the working day demonstrated this strikingly" (Capital vol III). In this period, while the historically contingent nature of capitalism might be obscured, the fact of exploitation is not. The magnitude of surplus value is increased by extending the length of the working day and labour power thus appears as the source of surplus value. It is only with the transition to the extraction of relative surplus value, in response to the success of the working class in shortening the working day, that capital, "becomes a very mystic being since all of labour's social productive forces appear to be due to capital, rather than labour as such, and seem to issue from the forms of capital" (Capital vol III).

The developed capitalist economy is organised around a unified process of production in which capital pumps out of the direct producers unpaid surplus labour in the form of surplus value. Surplus value itself does not however appear except as profit, interest or rent. The product of a unified process is differentiated into categories according to function in the process of production, but these differentiated portions of surplus value appear as independent revenues (profit, interest, rent). The reality of exploitation is hidden: in appearance three distinct categories of producers draw three distinct kinds of revenue from these distinct sources.

The separation of capital into "industrial" and "interest-bearing" capital results in the differentiation of surplus value into "profit of enterprise" and "interest". Profit of enterprise appears to be generated by the capitalist working with the means of production independently of the capital relation. Interest, on the other hand, appears to result from mere ownership of capital independently of the process of production. To the industrial capitalist profit of enterprise appears not as the unpaid labour of others, but as the fruit of his own labour: he creates profit not because he exploits, "but because he also works..." (Capital vol III). Appearing as a better paid worker (earning "wages of the labour of superintendence") his interests appear identical to those of "other" workers in opposition to those of interest-bearing capital.

At the same time, in interest, the connection between surplus value and labour vanishes, and, with it, the antithesis between capital and labour. Interest-bearing capital appears to produce money out of money and is thus "the most complete fetish" or the "consummate automatic fetish" (Theories of Surplus Value vol 3 1861-3). The inner connections of surplus value disappear: conflict over the division of the product appears to be accidental rather than essential to the relationship.

The class relationship appears, moreover, to be a necessary condition of production. It appears that labour must take the form of

wage labour and that access to life must be mediated by the wage. The conditions of wage labour appear as the conditions of labour in general and capital comes to be identified with "produced means of production" (Capital vol III p 624), ie as a thing and not a social relation. Absolute poverty appears as a natural condition of production and not one of social or historical origin. Production appears to be, necessarily, capitalist production.

Exploitation is further obscured with the development of the wage form. This gives the relation between capital and wage labour the appearance of an exchange relation. The value of labour power is in fact paid and this obscures the extortion of unpaid surplus labour in the form of surplus value. Even the repeated exchange of living labour for dead "is in fact only apparent" (Grundrisse p 294). Absolute poverty entails wage slavery: separated from the conditions of labour, living labour must sell itself to capital. But, obscured by the wage form, slavery appears as freedom: "In reality the labourer belongs to capital before he has sold himself to capital. His economic bondage is both brought about and concealed by his periodic sale of himself by his change of masters, and by the oscillations of the market price of his labour power" (Capital vol I).

Yet the same relationship, Marx argues, "introduces the apparent form of barter, of exchange, so that when competition permits the worker to bargain and so to argue with the capitalist, he measures his demands against the capitalist's profits and demands a certain share of the surplus value created by him; so that the proportion itself becomes a real moment of economic life itself" (Grundrisse p 597). In fighting for higher wages, workers do not merely "fight their employers over a purely commercial deal" as Lenin believed. In the course of this struggle and in the course of capitalist development "even the semblance is suspended that capital exchanges for labour capacity anything other than the latter's own objectified labour, ie that it exchanges anything at all for it" (Grundrisse p 674). It becomes clear that, in the wage, workers receive from capital only a part of their own labour. This "also enters the consciousness of the workers as well as the capitalists" (ibid p 597). The mystifications of the wage form are undermined by the struggle of the workers themselves. The development of this consciousness marks a phase in the process of class formation.

We have seen that the separation of capital into industrial and interest-bearing forms obscures the extortion of unpaid surplus labour. But this is only one side of the phenomenon. The appearance of "profits of enterprise" in the form of "wages of the labour of superintendence" initiates a process which leads to the questioning of the need for profit itself. As Marx points out, socialists came to demand that if profits are only a particular kind of wage, capitalists should "only draw the wages usually paid to managers" (LSY vol 3). The apologues intended to defend profit thus "boomerang on the apologists themselves" (ibid).

This tendency intensifies with the emergence of workers' co-operative factories and capitalist joint-stock companies. In both forms the function of supervision is "entirely divorced from the ownership of capital" (Capital vol III). With the development of these forms "profit appeared also in practice as it undeniably appeared in theory, as mere surplus value, a value for which no equivalent was paid, as realised unpaid surplus labour" (ibid). Again the development of the capital form reaches the stage where it can no longer hide behind appearances.

Earlier we noted that exploitation becomes increasingly obscured with the transition to the extraction of relative surplus value. This transition both develops the power of combined labour and obscures it. The powers of living labour appear transferred to capital as an activity of capital. The forms of socially developed labour - cooperation, manufacture, the factory, machinery and science - confront individual workers as powers of capital. Labour appears powerless as an independent force. "In machinery, objectified labour confronts living labour within the labour process as a power which rules it, a power which, as the appropriation of living labour, is the form of capital" (Grundrisse p 693). The totality of the powers of social labour exist, under capitalism, only when organised by capital. Social labour appears not as social labour but as the power of capital over atomised and isolated individual labourers: "this elevation of direct labour into social labour appears as a reduction of independent labour to helplessness in the face of the communality (Gemeinsamkeit) represented by and concentrated in capital." (Grundrisse p700). This is obscured capital's real dependence on labour.

What is veiled is "one of the civilising aspects of capital" (Capital vol III) - its propensity to create, through the development of the forces of production, the conditions and forces of its own dissolution. In developing the productive forces, capital brings into being combined labour. This appears initially as an "alien combination" forced upon the workers against their will and "subservient to and led by an alien will and intelligence" (Grundrisse p70). But, in time, it becomes a social force with the capacity for and tending towards planning.

The development of the productive forces under capital proceeds through the reduction of necessary labour time and the conversion of disposable time into surplus labour time. "Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth" (Grundrisse p706). The contradiction between the creation of disposable time and its conversion into surplus labour time is the basis for the transition to communism: "The more this contradiction developed the more does it become evident that the growth of the forces of production can no longer be bound up with the appropriation of alien labour, but that the mass of the workers must themselves appropriate their own surplus labour" (Grundrisse p708).

The development of combined labour as a social force manifests itself in the "transitional" forms of workers co-operatives and bourgeois joint stock companies. These forms, Marx argues, point beyond bourgeois economy. The co-operative factories of the workers "are proof that the capitalist as a functionary of production has become as superfluous to the workers as the landlord appears to the capitalist with regard bourgeois production" (TSV vol 3). They are, in other words, proof that working class self-formation has reached the point at which the specifically capitalist organisation of the immediate process of production at least has become unnecessary. In the joint stock company, moreover, a product of the same process, capital "is here directly endowed with the form of social capital (capital of directly associated individuals) as distinct from private capital, and its undertakings" (Capital vol III). The point of the joint stock company is to spread "risk", but as Marx observes, the shareholder is taking risks not with his own property but with social property. In this form, the opposition of class interests becomes more evident as social force confronts social force.

In the course of working class self-formation, the fetishes attached to production itself seem to become progressively undermined. On the other hand, those relating to the sphere of circulation and especially finance capital have been left untouched and have even begun to intensify as finance capital begins to emerge as an (apparently) dominant form. The development of finance capital is itself a response of capital to the formation of the workers into a class - it is a tragic attempt by capital to liberate itself from its dependence upon the working class. (Hillel H. Ticktin, Critique 16, 1983)

It is from this understanding of political economy that Marx's politics follows. As we shall see, with his development of the theory of fetishism, his understanding of the relation of class consciousness to class formation did not undergo substantial alteration. He presents co-operatives and trade unions as embryonic organs of class power (in conjunction with an independent party of the proletariat). Marx's assessment of this potential is inseparable from his assessment of their role within the political economy of capitalism as forms of expression of the developing "political economy of the working class".

The political economy of the working class is counterposed to that of the middle class. Marx refers to "the great contest between the blind rule of supply and demand laws which form the political economy of the middle class, and the social production controlled by foresight, which forms the political economy of the working class." (Inaugural Address). In essence, Marx is speaking of the conflict between the law of planning and the law of value. The law of value supposes a tendency for all commodities to exchange at their values; the law of planning by contrast requires the conscious regulation of production in accordance with need. The law of value and the law of planning express the two sides of the moving contradiction that is

capital. The development of the law of planning is the basis of working class self formation. The greater the development of the law of planning, the greater the ability of the working class to organise production consciously and collectively to meet needs. The law of planning is inherently subversive of the role of exchange in mediating between capacities and need. In its fullest expression it is the dissolution of capital and the self abolition of the working class - communism.

The workers' co-operative factories are an appearance of the embryonic form of planning within the immediate process of production. In themselves however, the co-operatives do not challenge capital within circulation. In so far as they continue to presuppose the market, they contribute to the illusion that labour can emancipate itself within commodity production. Marx was, however, aware that the existing co-operatives could never undermine capitalism. For that to be possible, "co-operative labour ought to be developed to national dimensions and, consequently, to be fostered by national means" (ibid).

Trade unions too are presented as embryonic class organisations and as late as 1873 Marx speaks of the "combinations that constitute the working class as a class antagonistic to the respectable category of masters, entrepreneurs, and bourgeois" (Political Indifferentism). Although they had their origins in spontaneous efforts by workers to defend themselves from capital, "unconsciously to themselves, the trade unions were forming centres of organisation of the working class ... If trade unions are required for the guerrilla fights between capital and labour, they are still more important as organised agencies for superseding the very system of wage labour and capital rule" (Instructions for Delegates to the Geneva Congress). The unions have tended to concentrate on local and immediate struggles with capital and held aloof from general social and political movements. They had now, Marx argued in 1866, to "learn to act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad interest of its complete emancipation" (ibid).

To defeat the "collective power of the propertied classes", Marx argued in 1871, the working class had to constitute itself as "a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes" (Speech to the London Conference on Working Class Political Action). This party - the International - is not conceived to be external to the working class and bringing consciousness to it "from without", for the International "was established by the working men themselves and for themselves" (ibid). It works in conjunction with the co-operatives and the trade unions, which are conceived to be embryonic organs of working class power because of their effects on the political economy of capitalism, namely their ability to subvert the law of value. In the Provisional Rules of the International Working Men's Association (1866) Marx claims that "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves".



Commodity Fetishism and the Prevention of Communism

In Marx, commodity fetishism is not introduced to explain the supposed passivity of the working class because this supposition is not made. The theory of commodity fetishism does not contradict the principle of proletarian self-emancipation.

Events since Marx's death, however, might be taken as grounds for doubt. The 20th century has witnessed the apparent depoliticisation of the workers' movement, the growing incorporation of the trades unions, the repeated accommodation to reformism, the outbreak of two world wars, the rise of fascism, the sustained failure of proletarian revolution and the emergence of monstrous bureaucratic regimes claiming to represent the interests of the world proletariat. These developments weigh like a nightmare on the minds of aspiring revolutionaries. This nightmare appears to justify the assumption of working class passivity which lies at the heart of 20th century socialist ideology.

Actually it is possible to acknowledge the reality of this nightmare without also accepting the purported conclusion. The political economy of the world has changed since Marx and the political effects of these changes - or, at least some of them - are registered in *'What Is To Be Done?'* But because the underlying political economy is not also analysed, the necessity of working class passivity seems to be implied. When, however, these phenomena are located in terms of the political economy of the epoch, it becomes possible to resist this implication.

Proletarian self-emancipation presupposes abundance. It also, and crucially, presupposes that the power of combined labour has developed to the point where its existence is incompatible with the continued rule of capital. This incompatibility does not immediately result in revolution but rather

signals the beginning of an epoch - long and tortuous - of transition, punctuated at various points by revolutions. The power of combined labour ensures that the development of the productive forces can no longer proceed on the basis of unimpeded operation of the law of value; development takes place through the decay of the capital form itself. "As soon as it [capital] begins to sense itself and become conscious of itself as a barrier to development it seeks refuge in forms which, by restricting free competition, seem to make the rule of capital more perfect, but are at the same time heralds of its dissolution and of the dissolution of the mode of production resting on it." (*Grundrisse* p651).

Capital is in potential and in tendency, a global phenomenon. To be able to supersede the capital form, the working class must therefore form itself as a class globally. At the very least absolute poverty and abstract labour must exist globally if workers are to assert themselves as the universal class. To the extent that further proletarianisation is possible, to that extent capital can cheat the grave.

In the late 19th century the growth of combined labour threatened capital accumulation in its heartlands of western Europe but only in its heartlands. Because combined labour could not yet form itself as a class globally, its tendency towards communism could be checked. This prevention of communism involved the conscious intervention of the bourgeoisie into its own political economy. The Paris Commune, the "new unionism" in Britain, and the growth of the SPD in Germany allowed the bourgeoisie a glimpse of the potential power of combined labour. This power was incompatible with the unimpeded functioning of the law of value. The latter was consciously limited through the acceptance of trade unions as representatives of labour within capitalism and through the

beginnings of a welfare programme which softened the effects of absolute poverty. The law of value came increasingly to rest upon, while the law of planning was strangled by, bureaucratic administration. With the formal and bureaucratic recognition of needs and the self-limitation of capital, space opened up for the representation of the working class within bourgeois society.

Social democracy at home rested upon imperialism abroad, their unifying principle being finance capital. By transferring capital investment to areas where little or no proletarianisation had yet taken place finance capital was able to temporarily outflank the development of the working class. By conceding locally capital was able to preserve accumulation globally. Ultimately, however, this process results in a global working class from which capital can do little to free itself. The prevention of communism obstructs the process of class formation only to bring about the conditions for its further development.

The prevention of communism intensifies with the development of stalinism. This grew out of the October revolution: the working class seized power under adverse circumstances and lost it, but to avoid globalising the revolution, capital was forced to avoid reasserting its dominance. As a result capital had to accept the absence of the capital-form - and therefore the presence of bureaucratic administration - within a whole national economy. This in turn forced it to accept the further intensification of the prevention of communism outside the USSR: the extension of social democratic nationalisation and the welfare state, the acceptance of "full employment" and central economic organisation. These forms preserve capitalism by checking the tendency towards communism but at the same time restrict the sphere of operation of the law of value and so act as a barrier to capital accumulation.

With the development of the prevention of communism the working class struggles within and against a new social reality. As apparent alternatives to capitalism, the forms of the prevention of communism appear to obviate the need for the workers themselves to take power directly. The formal recognition of needs appears to obviate the need for proletarian self-organisation. By mitigating the effects of absolute poverty, social democracy and stalinism create a barrier to proletarian self-formation in the form of the representation of the working class. The working class can now struggle for concessions within bourgeois society and its struggles lose their political edge - space opens up for the representation of the working class but at the same time the limits of that space are carefully policed.

On the other hand, especially with the passing of time, it becomes increasingly clear that social democracy and stalinism have failed from the perspective of working class needs. This fact enters workers' consciousness. But social democracy and stalinism are the outcomes of struggles waged by workers themselves and this fact

too enters working class consciousness. Workers are aware that they are exploited under capitalism but they are also aware that the historically existing "alternatives" do not solve the problem. In so far as the forms of the prevention of communism appear as alternatives, by appearing to be the only possible alternatives, they seem to indicate that there is in fact no alternative.

The prevention of communism permits the nationalised recognition of needs within the wider context of a world market economy, this nationalised recognition of needs being the basis for the global preservation of capital. The law of value is suspended to different degrees within specific national locations in order for it to be preserved globally through finance capital. International finance capital thus becomes the source of external discipline which is transmitted to the working class within specific national locations, through the forms of the prevention of communism. Through the movements of financial capital, absolute poverty and abstract labour are constantly re-created globally. Workers organise nationally only to find that the problem is international. Finance capital appears to be beyond the reach of working class action.

There is a sense in which social production has become increasingly "de-fetishised". To the extent that the law of value decays into bureaucratic administration social relations become more "transparent". Nationalisation, government subsidisation of industries inefficient from the standpoint of value, the welfare state, "full employment" etc indicate that the distribution of social labour can no longer be achieved through the law of value alone, but increasingly requires direct forms of social control. Thus, for example, the government intervenes in the "economy" to influence "demand", interest rates and inflation, to set up relatively permanent institutions of industrial arbitration, to adjust rents and to maintain or undermine "full" employment. With this intensification of direct forms of social control, however, it becomes clearer that it is people and not things which are the source of the problem. On the other hand, these non-value forms of control themselves are subordinate to value globally and function to preserve it. Social democracy and stalinism thus combine with finance capital to sustain the illusion of the eternity of the value form.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that much of the left has tended to present the forms of the prevention of communism as being transitional to communism. This is true not only of orthodox stalinist organisations but also of certain strands of trotskism. For some of the latter: "The Soviet experience, despite its very specific character, was nevertheless a great laboratory for establishing the superiority of planning over the anarchic market economy of capitalism, and for learning from the gross mistakes and miscalculations perpetrated by the Stalinist bureaucracy" (Anonymous "Forward" to the New Park edition of Trotsky's *Towards Capitalism or Socialism*, 1978,p70). By presenting stalinism as being

with whatever critical reservations, an advance on capitalism, such statements only obstruct the movement towards communism. Worse still, when the working class begins to move against the social forms within which it has been partially contained, it finds itself being urged back into line by the self-proclaimed enemies of the existing order: not only by the social democrats and the stalinists but also by those who claim to have developed the revolutionary critique. Workers rejection of the forms of the prevention of communism is then taken as evidence of continued passivity in the face of bourgeois ideology. The active intervention of these organisations into the communist movement of the working class itself obstructs that movement.

Communism has thus become identified with the prevention of communism. Disillusionment with the prevention of communism takes the form of disillusionment with communism itself. This does not imply a simple ideological victory for value. Consciousness can be understood only in its relation to political economy and the political economy of the working class is conscious determination of needs. Having been forced to recognise needs, even if only formally and bureaucratically, capital cannot institute their derecognition when the need arises. While it has been possible, with the unwitting aid of the left, to discredit communism, it is impossible to discredit needs. The political economy of the working class has not been - and cannot be - dislodged.

Inherited Ideology and Practical Needs

Communism is not an ethical ideal to be realised by means of proletarian revolution. As the society of the freely associating producers, communism is a practical need and can emerge only out of the struggles of the workers themselves. Proletarian revolution is not one possible means amongst others by which to bring into being a desired end, but the necessary outcome of a real social process.

This process is the process of self-formation of the working class. Marx observed it at the moments of the (partial) victory of the political economy of the working class over the political economy of the bourgeoisie, and recognised it as a process tending towards communism. Since Marx, however, the intervention of the bourgeoisie into its own political economy has appeared to undermine the possibility of proletarian self-emancipation. The results of this intervention have been understood in terms of consciousness and ideology alone and thus the communist perspective has been lost.

If we are to retrieve this perspective we must re-found our analysis on the movement of the working class itself. The critique of social democracy and stalinism cannot be developed in terms of consciousness alone but must begin from the standpoint of working class needs. Our task is not to apportion blame but to re-found marxism on the basis of an analysis of class composition and class formation within the political economy of the epoch as a whole. Failing to do this, the left has been unable to free itself from the inherited ideology of working class passivity. Losing contact with the political economy of the working class, the left is reduced to making assertion about consciousness, which assertions must degenerate into sectarianism.

It is unfortunate that many of those who have stressed the reality of proletarian self-activity have done so in a rather crude fashion. This is true of certain strands of autonomism. Thus Cleaver, for example, sometimes - but not always - presents the struggle of the working class as a process without end (Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, Harvester, 1979). If, however, the working class can continue to transform the social forms of capital accumulation indefinitely, the struggle of the working class has no tendency towards communism. Failing to analyse the fate of the law of value under the impact of the self-formation of the proletariat, the critique of "leninism" and "leninism" itself become polar opposites which eternally reproduce each other.

The crucial thing is to recognise the problem. Included in this is the unbridgeable gap between the project outlined in *What Is To Be Done?* and the principle of proletarian self-emancipation which formed the bedrock of the International Working Men's Association. We must return to Marx. More importantly, however, we must return to the developing political economy of the working class. Crucially, we must examine the conditions which are the outcome of working class struggle but against which the working class is forced to struggle again, if we are to understand the full complexity and difficulty of the situation. To begin to characterise this complexity we can use the words of William Morris, bearing in mind the different context in which they were written and discounting their gender specificity, reflecting on " ... how men fight and lose the battle and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes about turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name" (*A Dream of John Ball*). But this, it should be stressed, can only be our starting point.

David Gorman





From *Justice - Organ of Social Democracy*, no 1 vol 1, 19.1.1884

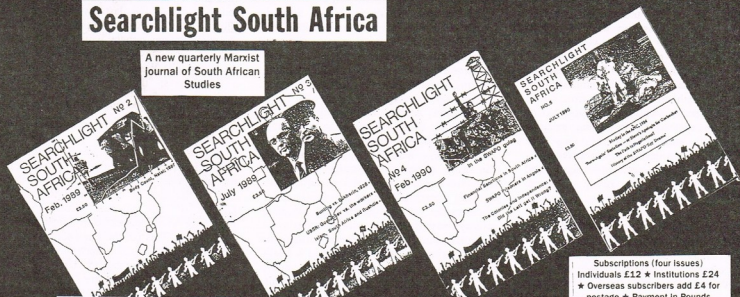
Here is what an American Socialist, writing in the Chicago Radical Review, has to say on the merits of the diverse means by which various persons and organisations propose to cure the evils of society:- "All those who seek to improve existing social conditions

under the name of Trade Unionists, knights of labour, self-styled individualists, Henry George "burden shifters," free-soilers, anti-monopolists, etc., etc., are in the same dilemma as the committee who were appointed in one of our western States to devise ways and means to erect a new jail. After a careful deliberation they passed three

resolves:- 1st, That we erect a new jail, 2nd, That the new jail be built out of the material of the old one, 3rd, That the old jail stand until the new one is built. Finding upon reflection that this was impossible to accomplish they passed a fourth - Resolved, that we unanimously recommend that the old jail be whitewashed.

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Anton Pannekoek and the Theory of the Transition

Pantheon building is poor historical materialism and leads to an impoverished history and yet it has been the essence of the bolshevik tradition's historiography. Linked to this is a scholasticism that refers to the writings of the pantheon to resolve all questions and disputes rather in the manner that fundamentalist christians refer to the Old Testament. It severely reduces the range of marxist analysis of historical events, even of the events around which the pantheon has been built. While Stalin and Trotsky are of course mutually exclusive the pantheon is otherwise common to all wings of the tradition and apart from Luxemburg (whose actual views are ignored) is restricted to the Bolshevik revolution. This freezes understanding of the dynamics of capitalist society to the point of view of men from an economically backward country, who despite extensive exiles played little or no part in the workers movement in advanced capitalism but concentrated on building an effective revolutionary organisation in a country numerically dominated by the peasantry with an antiquated and autocratic regime.

Lenin's blanket condemnation of the Second International and all its works has led to a neglect of its history and its theorists. And yet it is the organisation that grew with modern capitalism and the working class itself and in so many ways moulded the politics of the modern world. It is also the organisation that nurtured the members of the bolshevik pantheon and the one from which they never really escaped. They upended its outlook and methods but in the end remained locked in its categories and world view. The world we live in today is the world created by the practices of the Second International and its interaction with the ruling class and capitalist state.

Anton Pannekoek is one of the most important revolutionaries missing from the bolshevik tradition's pantheon (there were many others). The reason for this should be obvious. Pannekoek was the Karl Homer of Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder and a leading theorist of western European communism and in particular for the Communist Workers Party of Germany

(KAPD) whose separate organisation from the German Communist Party and tactics generally were the chief cause of Lenin writing against the "infantile disorder".

There was nothing infantile about European left communism. Pannekoek and his friend and collaborator Herman Gorter were both veterans of the bitter Dutch and German workers struggles that were characteristic of the international cycles of struggle beginning at the turn of the century and culminating with the "breaking of the weakest link" in 1917. Their support for striking workers against their unions and the party hierarchy split Dutch Social-democracy in 1909. Pannekoek was one of the most innovative theorists of the Second International, overturning many accepted theoretical categories, discounting others, giving new content to still more. He was widely, internationally, published and well known across the western world. He was virtually the only leading theorist to analyse, accept and champion the changing activity of the changing European working class.

Social-Democracy

The dominating influence on the Second International was its German section, the SPD. It is difficult now to imagine the size and range of this mighty institution. It is the closest we have ever come to the working class organised as the party (even if not quite as Marx had envisaged). On the other hand its structure, activity and theory were as much shaped by Bismarck and his autocratic state socialism as by marxist theory or autonomous working class activity. Bismarck's Exceptional Law had effectively banned revolutionary activity during the state-led growth of German industrial capital while at the same time allowing electoral activity and permitting social-democrats to sit in the structurally gerrymandered parliament, thus "opening up the possibility that it could act as the sole legal opposition" (Bricianer). Robert Michels pointed out in his sociological study of bureaucratisation and the party in the 1910s that "the struggle carried on by socialists against the parties of the dominant classes is no longer one of

principle, but simply one of competition". At the same time the SPD was growing into a state within the state in which it was possible to live from cradle to grave. It (or the unions which were part of it) organised strike-pay, unemployment benefit, sick pay, pensions, death grants, legal aid, nurseries, clinics, sports facilities and clubs, choirs, schools, women's and youth organisations, holiday facilities and much more. It published daily and weekly, national and local newspapers. And despite the growth of both openly revisionist and radical wings nobody thought to leave or split it until near the end of the first world war.

The almost schizophrenic nature of the SPD is best illustrated by its Erfurt Programme (adopted in 1891) which fell clearly and neatly into two parts. The first part was written by Kautsky and covered the final aims and "marxist" principles, the second by Bernstein and outlined immediate tactics and desired reforms. When Engels died Bernstein began a series of articles in the party paper that later became the bible of revisionism (published later in English as Evolutionary Socialism). Nobody paid much attention at first and it was the Englishman Belfort Bax (on whom see the last issue of Radical Chains) who first reacted in print and ignited the well known debate which degenerated into the "breakdown controversy". By 1906 the sociologist Weber was able to say of the SPD congress; "these gentlemen no longer frighten anyone".

The SPD had resolutely refused to recognise its illegality during the period of the Exceptional Law but behaved completely legally in every other respect. It continued in the same vein when the law was repealed. But by the turn of the century the steady growth of the German economy was beginning to be disrupted by international competition. This put the same sort of strains on class relations as had the vicious cyclical swings of early capitalism. Unskilled and unorganised workers were beginning to outflank the staid and defensive skilled craftsmen who formed the bulk of social-democracy, both party and trade unions (and even they were reacting to the new

uncertainties). International competition led to technical innovation and the concomitant changes in the labour process and class composition were creating a more militant and innovative working class that neither the state nor social democracy could contain.

Origins of a Revolutionary Theorist

Pannekoek had begun studying marxism in 1898 and rapidly became dissatisfied with the positivistic slant of orthodox marxian economics. In 1900 he commenced a study of the philosophical roots and discovered the work of Joseph Dietzgen, the man Marx hailed as "our philosopher". In Dietzgen's work, Pannekoek found "a clear, systematic elaboration of a theory of knowledge and an analysis of the nature of concepts and abstractions ... I was able to completely clarify my conception of the underlying relationship between Marxism and epistemology and develop it into a unified whole". His first thoughts on the party were contained in a letter to an early Dutch marxist, Frank van der Goes. He felt that the growth of class consciousness could be accelerated by an organised socialist movement, education and propaganda, channelling of activity, and waging of intense ideological struggles. Propaganda should be an "amplification and explanation" of what workers already see and perceive rather than something directed at them. The objective should be to develop a "social ideal" or "mental picture" of the subsequent, more highly developed social system, "since everything which man does must first exist as a more or less adequate conscious ideal". Pannekoek ruled out a sharp distinction between evolution and revolution, both being part of change by human action, only the external appearance being different. The critical link between economics and revolution was not crisis but the understanding and activity of the revolutionary class brought about by material conditions (this in reference to the continuing "breakdown controversy" started by Bernstein).

In 1901, in his first major work as a marxist, *De Filosofie van Kant en het Marxisme*, Pannekoek pointed out that Marx had left open the question of the exact content of consciousness and what its real relation to the material world was, and that this was the main reason for erroneous understandings of marxism. His 'Introduction' to the 1902 reprint of Dietzgen's *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, announced the key note for Pannekoek's entire development. As Gerber paraphrases it, echoing Marx's comment on man as architect not bee; "the material world and the world of consciousness reciprocally condition each other. Without changing the structure of society one could not change the structure of consciousness. But the converse also remains true; a revolutionary upheaval in the economic and social structure is impossible without a revolution of the society's forms of consciousness. Proletarian revolution must develop simultaneously in both the economic and the 'spiritual' spheres ... Men must therefore think change before they can accomplish change" (Gerber 1978). For Pannekoek, Dietzgen answers the question that Marx left open. He "raised

philosophy to the 'position of a natural science, the same as Marx did with history'. In his 'Introduction' Pannekoek traces the history of philosophy, tying it to material conditions. Finally, Dietzgen created the basis for a dialectical and materialistic understanding and "completes the work of Kant, just as Marx completed the work of Adam Smith". Philosophy remained important for the workers revolution, "as never since the first advent of production of commodities has there ever been such a fundamental revolution ... the new understanding gains ground step by step, waging a relentless battle against the traditional ideas to which the ruling class are clinging, this struggle is the mental companion of the social struggle" (compare this with Pannekoek's theory for a later stage when the working class had burst the confines of capitalist society and he placed the key theoretical struggle within the working class movement. See below).

Pannekoek was one of the few professional scientists to join the Second International (he was an astronomer/astro-physicist) and in 1904 began to clarify the relationship between science and marxism. "Thinkers can only work with the pre-existing conceptual materials of their era. The form in which new problems are posed often creates a consciousness of the insufficiency of the traditional views and new 'truths' are then put forward as an improvement of the traditional views" (*Klassenwissenschaft und Philosophie*). Technology relied on science which was part of the productive apparatus. Science represented its particular epoch; "a

new ruling class is able to understand through its particular class situation the new 'truths' that serve its interests. These new 'truths' then become a powerful weapon in the struggle against the rulers of the declining order, who have neither interest in nor understanding of, the new doctrines and perceive them only as a threat ... So it is with the natural sciences that accompanied the rise of the bourgeoisie; so it is too with political economy, which is the science of the proletariat ... a certain form of science can become an object and a weapon of class struggle ... a class has an interest only in the investigation and diffusion of those truths that directly advance its own living conditions". Historical materialism was the "class science of the proletariat", and Marx and Engels were representatives of that rising class, the "first class scientists of the new class". The proletariat "has every interest in discovering the inner laws of society and the sources of their endless torment. Because the working class is the only class which has nothing to conceal, and, therefore, can look at social phenomena in an unbiased manner, it alone is in a position to discover the truth about society".

Pannekoek interrupted his university career as an astronomer in 1906 when he was invited to teach political economy at the SPD party school in Berlin. He described the purpose of the school as follows; "We must clearly understand the nature of capitalism, not just to incite the workers to fight it but also to discover the best methods of combat. Where this understanding is lacking, tactics are governed by established traditions or

Joseph Dietzgen

Joseph Dietzgen (1828-1886) was a tanner and self-taught philosopher from Germany. He participated in the events of 1848 and was forced to flee to the United States. Thereafter he recrossed the Atlantic several times and travelled widely in America, often on foot. He was active in the workers' movement on both sides of the Atlantic. He also worked in Russia for several years. Toward the end of his life he took over the editorship of several anarchist newspapers in Chicago in the aftermath of the Haymarket demonstration and the mass arrests that followed. He corresponded with Marx, who personally introduced him at a meeting of the International and visited him during a journey to Germany. His first and best book is *The Nature of Human Brainwork* which presents an inductive theory of knowledge and bypassed Hume's dilemma by simply accepting that all theories are relative and contingent. As thoughts and theories derived from brainwork, a labour process, they were as material as physical objects. Pannekoek described

Dietzgen's theory of knowledge as; "primarily materialistic ... it starts from concrete, materialist being. Not that it regards mere physical matter as its basis; it is rather opposed to crude bourgeois materialism, and matter to it means everything that exists and furnishes material for thought, including thoughts and imaginations. Its foundation is the unity of all concrete being". Engels credited Dietzgen with the independent discovery of dialectical materialism but in Dietzgen's dialectics there were no absolute opposites or contradictions but a mental separation of the particular from the general, giving rise to contradictory categories, together with generalisation from the particular. Like Pannekoek, Dietzgen has been considerably better known worldwide than he is now. In Britain Dietzgen's works provided the background to the working class educationalists such as Fred Casey (see *Capital and Class* 7) and Noah Ablett (see the last issue of *Radical Chains*) working in the Picts League and Labour College movement.

superficial empiricism. When one merely takes account of the present, the immediate, appearances inevitably prove deceptive and coherence upon solid foundations is neglected." This sort of thinking upset Kautsky considerably. However, together with Rudolph Hilferding, Pannekoek was prevented from teaching at the school by the Prussian authorities on pain of deportation. Instead, he became a salaried journalist/propagandist and travelling lecturer for the party. Luxemburg took over Pannekoek's post, continuing the unsettling of Kautsky.

Mass Action and the Departure from Orthodoxy

It is possible that Pannekoek was prompted to leave academe by the 1905 Russian revolution. The reception of these events in Europe then was different to our perception of them today. Mass strikes had taken place all over Europe, and continued to take place regularly until the outbreak of war, and all discussion of the Russian events took place in the context of a debate on "mass action" and the "mass strike". The revolution as such was not even discussed at the meeting of the International. In Germany the debate signified the hardening of a division in the party no longer between revisionists and the rest but between radicals and the rest. Orthodoxy, verbally anti-revisionist but dedicated to organisation, discipline and "practical" activity, ruled at the centre but locally and particularly in the industrial regions a more radical politics was gaining ground.

From 1907 to 1909 Germany suffered a general economic crisis, and in 1908 a campaign was launched for universal suffrage in Prussia. Political strikes were organised but to begin with at least, social-democratic discipline was maintained. Pannekoek was beginning to have doubts about the utility of traditional working class organisations and parliamentarism. In a factional document in the Dutch Social-democratic Party he questioned the standard strategy of revolutionary parliamentarism for subjective effects on the basis that "Dietzen teaches us not to doubt the truth but to have doubts about the absolute validity of a truth". "This truth is not absolute" he said of parliamentarism "it has its limitations. The labour movement has adapted itself to the strategy of parliamentarism more than is really necessary and it is impossible to attain our goals through these methods alone. A revolutionary struggle with more powerful mediums is necessary".

The general debate on "Massenaktion" and the "Massenstreik", followed by the highly disciplined but unsuccessful Prussian suffrage campaign seems to have prompted Pannekoek to reconsider the whole social-democratic project during 1909 (this was also the year of the split in the Dutch party). He published Social Democratic Non-commissioned Officers in the Bremen Bürgerzeitung. In this article he went beyond the parameters of the mass strike debate to call into question the whole basis of the

existing organisation because there was an "irreconcilable opposition between revolution and authority, between subversion and order". In the suffrage campaign, "the social-democratic non-commissioned officers do what the Prussian non-commissioned officers cannot do, they quiet the unruly masses, accustom them to discipline, and divert them from revolution". The "corruption of the movement" was "the main hope of the bourgeoisie".

In another attack on orthodoxy in 1909, Massenaktion und Revolution, Pannekoek argued that the subjugation of the working class was not entirely due to economics and force but also to the "spiritual superiority of the ruling minority" which controlled schools, churches, press and "presides over all spiritual development, all science". The main cause of the weakness of the proletariat was the "spiritual dependence of the proletariat on the bourgeoisie". Invoking "organisational spirit" as a way of breaking this dependence, Pannekoek insisted, against Kautsky's earlier accusation of mysticism, that this was "not something abstract, put forward in place of the 'real concrete organisation' of the existing organisational forms, but it is in fact something just as real and concrete as these forms. It binds individuals just as firmly together as any principles and statutes could ever do so that even if the external bond of principles and statutes were removed these individuals would no longer be loose atoms competing against each other."

Pannekoek's most important development of his theory of *geist* (collective consciousness) also came in 1909 in Tactical Differences Within the Labour Movement (see box for extract). In this long and closely argued work he discusses the material and social origins, mediated through human thought, of revisionism, giving rise to reformism and anarchism (the new and growing anarcho-syndicalism) giving rise to purist revolutionism. Both had their roots in historically superseded middle class attitudes dating from the time of the bourgeois revolution and entered the working class movement by a variety of routes; the parliamentary deputies and trade union bureaucrats anxious for their jobs, the new proletariat forming in small manufacture as capitalism developed in country regions and the lower middle class anxious for its position in a world increasingly dominated by large capital. To adopt one of these positions to the exclusion of the other was an ideological error. But the dominant proletariat of the large factories and heavily industrialised regions were capable of seeing them both as necessary to development and as stages of that development due to their dialectical and materialist outlook. Nonetheless one or other would always predominate in the movement depending on the development of capitalism; in times of growth reforms would be worked for, when crisis hit revolutionism would come to the fore. Pannekoek defined reforms as positions of power for the class rather than as factors of power, the strength gained in fighting for and winning reform being more important than

the reform itself. There was no linear path through reform to socialism as reforms, such as the limitation of working hours, would be of no practical use in post-capitalist society where workers ran production. Finally he noted that because socialism as an ideology rather than as a science could be adopted by virtually anybody and given content derived from their own experience, it was gaining ground amongst the middle classes of the colonised countries as a response to the bankruptcy of liberal ideology. Lenin described all this as "deductions whose complete correctness cannot be denied" even though the *geist* theory on which it was based completely contradicted his own theory of consciousness as represented in, for instance, Materialism and Empirio-criticism.

Organic Connection

In April 1910 Pannekoek settled in Bremen. He had first visited the town in 1905 to support local radicals in a debate over education. This debate revolved around the suggestion for joint work with the Liberals (a parliamentary alliance had been proposed by the SPD deputies in 1905). The radicals defeated this suggestion, a victory that heralded their coming domination of the area. This prompted Ebert, until then leader in Bremen (later known locally as "the Stalin of Social-democracy") to leave for Berlin, where he effectively took over the leadership of the national party from August Bebel in 1912. During Pannekoek's brief period at the Berlin party school he had met one of the Bremen radicals, Heinrich Schulz, and from then on his articles were regularly published in the local party newspaper, the *Bürgerzeitung*. By this time the radicals controlled not only the newspaper, but the newly formed local secretariat, party education and recruitment as well. Bremen as a town was a model of what was happening all over industrial Germany. Once a commercial town of the Hanseatic League it had been heavily industrialised in the period from 1890, the working population growing from 8,463 to 33,825 in 1907 becoming a mass workers town. By that time 66% of the workforce worked in factories of more than 200 employees and 57% of the workforce had been born elsewhere.

Factional struggle had broken out in the SPD in the context of street fighting during the renewed suffrage campaign in Prussia. Despite violent brawling and pitched battles the SPD leadership re-exerted its control and discipline. The organisation was by all accounts impressive. On one occasion the venue for a demonstration in Berlin was changed at the last moment to evade the police and enabling 100,000 people to go on a "suffrage stroll". Kautsky published his defence of orthodoxy and the primacy of party discipline The Road to Power in this context, but Luxemburg was at last allowed to criticise the tactics of the party via a critique of Kautsky. Faith in the orthodox tactic of "revolutionary parliamentarism" was beginning to break down as the party apparatus and its deputies became ever more involved with "practical matters". In Die Organisation im Kampfe Pannekoek began to

see the question of organisation in a new way due to "new experiences in the class struggle" - mass actions, exemplified by the 1905 revolution. It was no longer a problem of leadership for conscious revolution but rather of direct organisation for revolution by the class itself; "It is not merely a question of the labouring masses simply acquiring consciousness of this task, but of their grasping it firmly and decisively. The movement will never be able to take its

proper course as long as they sit around waiting for their leaders to give the word. An acceleration of our struggle is possible only when the masses themselves seize the initiative, leading and pushing their organisations forward". At this stage however, Pannekoek in common with the rest of social democracy had not seen the importance of the 1905 soviets or workers councils.

In the autumn of 1910 Pannekoek's doubts about the efficacy of social-democratic organisation for the self-liberation of the working class seemed vindicated. A lockout in the Hamburg docks prompted a walkout in Bremen despite every effort by the trade union leadership to prevent it. For several years wages and conditions had been deteriorating, the employers response to the increasing international competition, especially in shipbuilding. No real support was forthcoming from the leadership. For three months they attempted to force a return to work and a meeting called to sell this to the membership was broken up by workers. Despite this a return to work was enforced. This left a legacy of discontent among the workers but forged strong links between them and the Bremen radicals who had given their full support. In an attempt to defend their action the union leadership claimed that the masses were "capricious, unreliable and incapable of making important decisions". Pannekoek responded that a split between the leaders and the masses was an "inevitable and necessary" step in revolutionary development.

It was increasingly evident to some that both war and revolution were approaching. The International had adopted a hard line resolution against war preparations from Lenin and Luxemburg in 1907 and after the Agadir incident in 1911 called on the SPD to start practical anti-war agitation. The SPD refused on the grounds that this would distract people from domestic issues in the forthcoming elections(!).

Debating Kautsky

Kautsky continued his defense of the orthodox position in a series of articles in *Die 'Neue Zeit, Mass Action* and in 1912 Pannekoek took over the continuing polemic with him from Luxemburg. This is the controversy cited by Lenin in *State and Revolution*. Pannekoek forced from Kautsky explicit statements of his policy of "actionless waiting". Pannekoek now saw revolutionary mass action as a continuous and expanding series of actions ranging from ordinary street demonstrations through to general strike. The rationale was not to be the attainment of the objective aims but the subjective effect, building "organisational spirit" and effecting "the whole transformation of the proletarian mentality". He also stressed the necessity of the "autonomy" of mass action rather than it being turned on and off like a tap by the party functionaries; "when we speak of mass actions and their necessity, we mean by this an extra-parliamentary political intervention of organised workers, the latter acting at the political level instead of leaving this completely to their delegates". Lenin's marginal notes here state "nevermore" - not true. But Pannekoek was working from the concrete conditions of the time: "Imperialism and mass action are new phenomena ...", and a genuinely revolutionary standpoint "the social revolution involves the gradual dissolution of all the power instruments of the ruling class, particularly the state, while simultaneously building up proletarian power to its fullness". This seems to have been his

From: Tactical Differences Within the Labour Movement (1909, reprinted in Bricianer)

The proletariat have their own dialectical idea of necessary social development, whose stages can be grasped only in terms of antagonistic notions - for example, revolution and evolution, theory and practice, final objective and movement. Especially proletarian is the idea that all apparently opposed situations are simply movements in a major process of development. The proletariat does not reason along logical either/or lines - for example, either revolution or evolution - but sees in two such elements simply two aspects of the same development ... The middle class, non-dialectical way of thinking takes account only of the accidental, which for the most part is merely a passing phenomenon, and so it swings from one extreme to the other. It notices contradictions only in the form of "on the one hand ... on the other hand," but without seeing in them the driving force of development; in its view, a development is to be seen as a slow evolution which, while no doubt ends by effecting some change, leaves the essential quality intact.

This first opposition is closely connected with the second. While the proletarian outlook is materialist, the middle class outlook is ideological; dialectic and materialism go hand in hand, as do ideology and non-dialectic. For the proletariat, it is material forces that govern the world, forces outside the scope of the individual; for the middle class, development depend on the creative force of the human mind. The material reality is dialectical; that is, it can be truly grasped only as a unit made up of opposed ideas. By contrast, in the notions and ideas which, according to the middle class way of thinking, constitute the driving force of development, the terms of the contradiction mutually exclude one another as notions; for example, evolution and revolution, liberty and organisation. We are concerned in the middle class context with abstract ideas, with incompatible essences, no account being taken of the underlying material reality; either revolution or evolution, without the possibility of a third term. So, when revolution is regarded as the only true principle, minor reforms are automatically declared anathema; or, vice versa, the minor reforms are alone considered valid. Socialism is the ideology of the modern proletariat. Ideology signifies a system of ideas, conceptions and plans, a spiritual expression of the conditions of material life and of class interests. But these spiritual expressions do not exactly correspond to the reality of their context. The ideas and conceptions are expressed in an abstract manner in which the concrete reality whence the ideology has been derived does not always appear, or appears with a variety of different aspects. So the idea of freedom, as a political watchword, derives from middle class interest in free enterprise and free competition; but each class that uses it gives the idea a meaning of its own...

... Every class can shape its ideas only on the elements of reality it knows directly; it does not understand, and therefore ignores, whatever is foreign to its own experience. So it is that it projects upon the ideas and ideals it has adopted experiences and desires associated with its particular situation...

... The ideas and conceptions of the proletariat have as their basis a science of society that enables them to foresee the consequences of their actions and the reactions of the other classes. Up to the present, ideologies, lacking awareness of concrete reality, were simply an extravagant reflection of the economic situation, whereas socialism constitutes a clear scientific theory; Ideology and science are both abstract, general expressions of concrete reality; but the basic difference between them is that an ideology constitutes an unconscious generalisation, one in which awareness of the corresponding concrete reality is lost, whereas science is a conscious generalisation whose conclusions make it possible to discern precisely the concrete reality from which they have been drawn. Hence, therefore, ideology is above all a matter of sentiment, while science is a matter of intellection.

... The role of theory in the workers' movement is to deflect the will from direct, instinctive, powerful impulses, and to render it responsive to conscious and rational knowledge. Theoretical knowledge enables the worker to escape from the influence of immediate and limited interests, to the great benefit of the general class interest of the proletariat; it enables him to bring his activity into line with the long-term interest of socialism.... It is the implementation of theory, the scientific basis of socialism, that will contribute most effectively to both securing for the movement a tranquil and sure course, and to the transformation of unconscious instinct into conscious human action.

first overt thinking on the transition period, an area totally neglected by theorists of the Second International.

Pannekoek was always aware of the importance of the tactics developed by the working class in struggle and the necessity of incorporating anything new into his theory of development towards revolution. The official party seemed less and less willing or able to support the workers' struggle. 1913 saw more militant activity in the docks. Again it spread from Hamburg. This time the union leadership refused to recognise the action at all. Shop stewards' committees were formed (a new development) and 9,000 walked out. Without strike pay the workers were eventually forced back to work. The enforced settlement blacklisted several thousands. On this occasion the radicals attempted to mediate in conjunction with the union leadership. A consciously revolutionary group separated themselves and coalesced around Pannekoek. This would be the nucleus of the ISD (see below). In the Bremen party paper, Pannekoek again drew the lessons; "the wildest strike with its violation of that discipline which has hitherto

been the ideal of a developed trade union shows how impossible it is to maintain perfect trade union discipline against the intense oppression exerted by capital. Success of mass movements depends on their capacity for autonomous action ... but it is precisely these qualities, the primary condition of the struggle for freedom, that are repressed and annihilated by trade union discipline". Pannekoek was by now aware that this would lead the masses to "take different paths" and was able to face this with equanimity.

War and Revolution

At the outbreak of war in 1914 Pannekoek was expelled from Bremen back to Holland. The SPD Reichstag deputies, having already voted for a massive arms budget in 1913 on the basis that it would be funded from a property tax, voted for war credits. In 1915 the Dutch Tribunists including Pannekoek were instrumental in setting up the Zimmerwald conference. Pannekoek and Henriette Roland-Holst were nominated to edit *Vorbote*, the conference journal.

In a 1916 article in *Vorbote*, *Der Imperialismus und die Aufgaben des Proletariats*, Pannekoek gave his explanation of the collapse of German social-democracy. It was not a question of purely crude material (physical) force but rather "a general inability to struggle, a lack of will for class struggle". A "long drawn out process of spiritual renewal" would be necessary to form a new International. Another article in *Vorbote* points out "the wartime experience gained during state control over industry and commerce has developed, in a large part of the bourgeoisie, the idea of state 'socialism' ... this state socialism can only aggravate the proletarian condition and strengthen oppression. Nationalisation of enterprises is not socialism; socialism is the force of the proletariat".

In December of 1916 the Bremen group, by then calling itself the International Socialists (ISD), broke all connections with the two wings of social-democracy that were later to become the SPD-M and the USPD (see below). Its organ, *Arbeiterpolitik*, was open to outsiders such as Radek, Zinoviev and Pannekoek. Describing its political line, it stated; "one must choose the tactics of mass action unfettered by leaders, or one must keep the leadership structure, as the Spartacus League is doing, and thereby renounce a proletarian policy". Similarly in Holland the group around Gorter and Roland-Holst split from the Tribunists. In August 1917 Pannekoek noted that in Russia "the revolutionary masses are forming a powerful organisation. As in 1905, the delegates of factories and revolutionary regiments are building in the form of workers' and soldiers councils, a peoples representation which speaks out vigorously against bourgeois government and exploiters". He noted that "some quasi-marxists" maintained that Russia was not ripe for socialism, because of its huge peasantry and limited capitalist development, failing to recognise that "socialism can only result from a long process in which the maturity of a society is measured by the proletariat's ability to struggle for power". In October, unlike Luxemburg, he approved of the dissolution of the Russian Constituent Assembly by the Bolsheviks; "What we have been hoping for has just been realised".

Common knowledge of the German revolution is often limited to the "Spartacist" uprising, the failure of which saw the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. But the revolution neither started nor ended there.

Despite the action of the SPD deputies in voting for war credits in 1914 the SPD did not actually split until 1917 when the anti-war opposition was expelled. This was despite the attendance of Luxemburg and Kautsky at the Zimmerwald conference. Lenin had been unable to persuade Luxemburg to split Social-democracy at that stage. When they were excluded Luxemburg's group, the Spartakusbund, met with Kautsky's group, also expelled, and against the wishes of both leaders, formed the United SPD (USPD). With the example of Russia before them the ISD condemned this as a return to the "old leader politics".



As the German economy and war effort began to collapse, strikes broke out in the munitions industry. The USPD reaction was to mediate and they were soon brought to a halt. Luxemburg was of the opinion that the German proletariat was not ready for revolution. As the German regime itself collapsed Ludendorff brought the SPD into the government and sued for peace. As in Russia, the soldiers had already made this decision for themselves. So had the naval ratings, who, sensing that the admirals were planning a last ditch battle against the Entente powers, first seized their ships and barracks and then spread across the country encouraging the workers to set up their own councils.

The SPD was still strong enough in the working class to dominate these councils while remaining in government thus straddling a very peculiar dual power situation. Under the leadership of Noske and Ebert the SPD performance was one of the coolest counter-revolutionary of all time. Within ten days they had arranged the Stinnes-Legien agreement: the trade unions and councils were consolidated in the factories with a provision for a "co-operative commonwealth" of workers and employers (!). The National Congress of Councils consented to early elections to a National Assembly. At this point the ISD, newly renamed the International Communists (IKD), declared these councils not to be revolutionary organs and one region, East Saxony, led by Otto Rühle, left the councils completely. Meanwhile the SPD government, biding its time, began to build the Freikorps - proto-fascist volunteer militias.

By christmas of 1918 the USPD has fallen apart into its constituent factions and Karl Radek, newly returned from Moscow, urged unification between the Spartacists and the IKD. At the subsequent founding conference of the German Communist Party (KPD) Luxemburg and the rest of the leadership of the Spartacists found themselves isolated and defeated on the questions of hierarchical organisation, restoring parliamentary activity and only avoided losing on the question of leaving the trade unions by moving the establishment of a special commission.

Within days, in January 1919, under provocation, Berlin KPD called for massive street demonstrations. This escalated rapidly into a general uprising. In Bremen the predominantly ex-IKD KPD and the workers' councils seized power. Similar events took place all over Germany. But in Berlin the ex-Spartacist leadership failed to lead and the workers were defeated. For Luxemburg this was further proof that the German workers were not ready for revolution; her comments were later paraphrased as "the leaders were in conference, in conference, in conference. No, these masses were not ready for the seizure of power, or their initiative would have discovered others to stand at their head, and their first revolutionary act would have been to compel the leaders to stop their interminable conferences in the Polizeipraesidium" (cited by Victor Serge in *Year One of the Russian Revolution*). The SPD government finally set the Freikorps to

work. Revolutionary workers' councils were bloodily suppressed region by region. The Bremen workers republic held out for three weeks. Luxemburg and Liebknecht were killed "while trying to escape". The KPD was banned. The workers were not beaten however. A strike wave starting in the Ruhr mining region spread rapidly, with workers forming unions opposed to the old SPD-dominated trades unions. These looked to the experience of the American IWW or the older French syndicalist tradition. Anti-parliamentarian and support for the new workers' unions split the KPD. A programme written by Pannekoek along these lines and supported by the Bremen group was discussed throughout the party. In August Levi, who had taken over from Luxemburg as leader, was beaten in a debate on Pannekoek's paper at the KPD national conference. In October, Levi organised a secret and packed conference and contrived to expel all those who would not conform to a new platform of tactical principles. This included a return to parliamentary activity and the trade unions and support for the institutionalised factory councils. Half the delegates were expelled and eventually 80% of the membership left. The communist left were particularly taken aback as Gorter had just made the first translation of Lenin's *State and Revolution* which appeared to give Lenin's imprimatur to their tactics.

The workers' unions had formed into the General Workers' Union of Germany (AAUD) in February with statutes drawn up by the Bremen group. This revolutionary federation attained a membership high of 200,000 and saw itself as the embryo of revolutionary workers' councils. Now the extreme right took a hand. The Versailles treaty required the disbandment of the Freikorps. In response the Berlin Erhardt brigade launched a putsch which scared the SPD ministry from Berlin. The rump KPD stated that it would not lift a finger to protect the bourgeois government but the old trade union confederation immediately launched a general strike. In the Ruhr, by now a left communist stronghold, a red army formed with 80,000 workers under arms. The strike was total and brought the junta to its knees within days. The SPD government on its return to Berlin set the army on the Ruhr. The KPD declared itself a loyal opposition to the SPD government. After these experiences the left communists, who had so far refused to accept their exclusion from the KPD, reformed as the Communist Workers Party (KAPD) and agreed to send delegates to the second congress of the Third International in Moscow. In preparation Pannekoek wrote *World Revolution and Communist Tactics* which was published in various communist journals in Europe and Russia. It remains with its 'Afterword' and Gorter's *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* the definitive statement of left communist analysis of the period.

The purge of the KPD by Levi had been against the advice of Radek, representing the International, and was the first move in the international movement against the anti-parliamentary current. The KAPD, unaware of any change in Lenin's thinking, expected to receive his support against Levi. The

invitation issued by the Bolsheviks to the first congress of the International had specifically excluded social-democrats of the right and centre and specifically included revolutionary elements who had not necessarily belonged to the parliamentary parties of the Second International. Many of these groups had always taken anti-parliamentary positions "on principle" and others, noting the Bolsheviks' dispersal of the Constituent Assembly, had moved to the advocacy of a workers' council system in opposition to bourgeois parliaments as Lenin had done in his April Theses. Invited to the second congress were, amongst others, the centrists the USPD, whose members included both Kautsky and Bernstein.

Lenin did disapprove of the split in German communism, apparently hoping to bring the anti-parliamentarian fraction round to his new position, and the KAPD were not excluded from the congress, the International not having, in any case, any mechanism for exclusion at that time. However, the KAPD's representative Otto Rühle, who had travelled slowly through Russia on his way to the congress, returned immediately to Germany after having been shown Lenin's theses on conditions of membership of the International. In the light of what he had seen in Russia Rühle denounced the regime as "soviet in name only". The KAPD excluded him. Thus the KAPD was unrepresented at the congress and one of the most important documents of European communism was not discussed.

What was presented to the second Congress was Lenin's Left-wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder. It is this assessment of European left communism that sits on every socialist's bookshelf while Pannekoek is absent. Thus it is not apparent that Left-wing Communism was a contribution to a debate that was of major importance in the world communist movement, for while Lenin admits that anti-parliamentarism was geographically widespread he does not make clear the size of the forces ranged against what was after all a change of policy not does he admit the intellectual rigour of their arguments.

Geist and Communist Tactics

It should be stressed that WR&CT was not an anti-Lenin or anti-Bolshevik text but rather theoretical support for an appeal to Lenin and the International to intercede against opportunism in the German and international communist movement. It does this by presenting a theory of transition to a communist society. Although Pannekoek was later fiercely to attack both Lenin's philosophy and the Bolshevik's running of the "soviet" state, his target here is opportunism in western Europe and especially in Germany and Britain, because of its effects not only on the working class of Europe but also on Russia and the Bolsheviks themselves via the agency of the International.

While WR&CT is more than a council communist manifesto, workers' councils, soviets, were for Pannekoek the major

breakthrough of the current phase of development towards communism. In a slightly earlier article in the journal of the International's Vienna Centre, *Kommunismus*, he described the workers' councils as: "the organ of the dictatorship of the proletariat in which the bourgeoisie cannot participate. The bourgeoisie will not be excluded in any artificial way from government, for instance, by losing its right to vote; quite simply, it will be barred from this organisation, which is based not on people but on labour ... All these councils remain in close permanent contact with the masses, their membership constantly renewed and replaced. The formation of a new bureaucracy is thus prevented, and a monopoly in administrative skills is broken." (*Bolshevismus und Demokratie* 1919, Bricianer 1978 pp150-151)

Pannekoek was not much given to quoting chapter and verse from Marx, leaving that to his pedantically orthodox opponents such as Kautsky, although he paraphrased Marx without attribution frequently. He prefaced WR&CT, however, with an epigram from Marx's *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (the same source as the cover quotation of *Radical Chains*): "Theory itself becomes a material force once it takes hold on the masses ... once it becomes radical." Thereafter Pannekoek's first two sentences reveal the foundation of his marxism: "The transformation of capitalism into communism is brought about by two forces, one material and the other mental, the latter having its origins in the former. The material development of the economy generates consciousness, and this activates the will to revolution." "Marxist science" which arises from "the general tendencies of capitalist development" provides the revolutionary movement with intellectual unity. On the one side this theory is gradually penetrating the working masses while on the other side their own experience begins to convince them that capitalism is no longer viable. But, "world war and rapid economic collapse now makes revolution objectively necessary before the masses have grasped communism intellectually; and this contradiction is at the root of the contradictions, hesitations and setbacks which make the revolution a long and painful process". The core of Pannekoek's argument is here: a communist revolution requires not only crude material objective circumstances but also an aware, consciously communist proletariat. Communist society requires communist individuals, united through conscious social organisation. For Pannekoek communist consciousness and organisation were inextricably and dialectically linked.

Pannekoek believed that "as far as western Europe is concerned, the development of revolution is mainly determined by two forces; the collapse of the capitalist economy and the example of Soviet Russia". In Russia, proletarian organisation (meaning the councils and what Pannekoek took to be the council state), had been relatively easy to attain. And so therefore had the revolution. Capitalism was relatively recent, the ruling classes were divided and the bourgeoisie proper were weak (plus the peasant

revolution paralleled the proletarian revolution). In western Europe, on the other hand, capitalism was long-established, the ruling class was united (by and against the working class) and the bourgeoisie very strong. In addition the peasantry, by virtue of its economic position, was both small and anti-working class.

The long history of capitalism in western Europe explained the Geist of the masses which in turn explained the course of events of the German revolution. "Because the proletarian masses were still completely governed by a bourgeois mentality, they restored the hegemony of the bourgeoisie with their own hands after it had collapsed". Economic collapse had in fact happened; not the indefinitely future, much theorised collapse of the "breakdown" controversy, but an actual complete social breakdown. It was possible to starve in Germany in 1920. "Economic collapse is the most powerful spur to revolution". But given the Geist of the working masses, "the revolution in western Europe will be a slow, arduous process". Unlike Russia "power will not fall into the hands of the unprepared masses as a result of politico-economic collapse; the proletariat will have to fight hard for it, and will thus have attained a higher degree of maturity when it is won".

The example of Soviet Russia was important, the soviet state existed as a model; "the existence of a state in which working people are the rulers, where they have abolished capitalism and are engaged in building communism, could not but make a great impression upon the proletariat of the whole world" but this was not enough on its own, "the human mind is most strongly influenced by the effects of its own environment".

The environment of the German proletariat was one where capital was attempting to re-impose its rule after social collapse and the proletariat was engaged in a struggle against impoverishment. This was seen by Pannekoek as turning into a conscious revolutionary struggle but even that in itself did not automatically imply a conviction of communism.

Pannekoek did not believe that the bourgeoisie were capable of the social reconstruction that was necessary after the war. The bourgeoisie "or rather each individual bourgeois acted in a characteristically bourgeois manner; each of them thought only of making as much profit as possible" meanwhile, and as consequence, there is "an increase in the frequency of strikes and a strong aversion to work among the proletariat". The bourgeoisie may have, individually, been incapable of reconstruction, but Pannekoek believed that they had learned more from the Russia revolution than the workers had; the bourgeoisie "decked itself out in red ... (and) immediately began to rebuild the organs of its power", giving the only party that had any chance of disciplining the working class, the SPD, the chance to do so in the name of the bourgeois state. In effect, the reformist party had to defeat the revolutionary working class in order to bring about reform for the

(supposed) benefit of that class.

But the bourgeoisie was only forced to rely on the SPD because of the strength of the working class. The revolution was not over yet. It evidently was going to be a long process. Under the circumstances the SPD could only rule with the consent of the working class. It was in effect a government of workers' bureaucracy. Pannekoek foresaw a chaotic series of these workers' bureaucracies, not necessarily parliamentary, as the class learnt that it itself had to take over the running of the economy. "Each new phase of the revolution brings a new layer of as yet unused leaders to the surface as the representatives of particular forms of organisation, and the overthrow of each of these in turn represents a higher stage in the proletariat's self-emancipation". It would take time; "it will take decades to overcome the infectious, paralysing influence of the bourgeois culture upon the proletariat in the old capitalist countries" because "revolution requires social reconstruction to be undertaken, difficult decisions to be made, the whole proletariat involved in creative action ... this is difficult and laborious, thus, so long as the working class thinks it sees an easier way out through others acting on its behalf ... the old habits of thought will make it hesitate and remain passive". Thus both the objective circumstances and subjective perceptions affect progress towards communism; "a revolution simultaneously involves a profound upheaval in the masses thinking, it creates the conditions for this, and is itself conditioned by it".

A revolution in the Geist of the working class was obviously necessary. Where else did the power of the bourgeoisie lie? It could not reside in their numbers, the proletariat was far more numerous. Their control of the "whole of economic life" was important but fading (under the influence of even the existing councils and working class resistance). Their "control of the state, with all its means of coercion" was important but it had collapsed in 1918 and the workers had been unable to prevent its re-imposition. The workers were imbued with bourgeois ideology, they believed that the bourgeois interest constituted the general interest. This ideology was inculcated by the intelligentsia. The press, schools and the church all played their part; "priests, teachers, literati, journalists, artists, politicians - form a numerous class, the function of which is to foster, develop and propagate bourgeois culture ... the hegemony of capital is rooted in this group's intellectual leadership of the masses". These groups constantly reinforce bourgeois culture which "exists in the proletariat primarily as a traditional cast of thought". Tradition in itself was a problem, even the workers' own, inextricably linked with bourgeois society as it was; "the proletariat has in every period had to build up methods, forms and aids to struggle corresponding to the contemporary stage of capitalist development ... they have subsequently become fetters upon development which had to be broken", "every stage of the development of the class struggle must overcome the tradition of the previous stages".

With temporary victory turned to temporary defeat in the German revolution, Pannekoek could see that it was the workers' movement's own traditions that now embodied "the hegemony of bourgeois conceptions". The problems in part derived from the belief in leaders, and especially parliamentary leaders. During the long development of the working class these beliefs united the class; "social democracy originally sought to realise this class unity" but "the firm solidarity and discipline which developed in the often acute class struggle of half a century did not bury capitalism, for it represented the power of leadership and organisation over the masses". This power took the concrete form of "reverence for abstract slogans like 'democracy' ... old habits of thought and programme points, such as the realisation of socialism through parliamentary leaders and a socialist government ... the lack of proletarian self-confidence ... lack of faith in their own power, but above all in their trust in the party, in the organisation and in the leaders who for decades had incarnated their struggles, their revolutionary goals, their idealism". The leaders and the parties, "these enormous machines painstakingly created by the masses themselves ... now crushed all the revolutionary tendencies once more flaring up in the masses".

Dependency on the party was the problem. Not this party or that, but all parties; "a revolution can no more be made by a big party or a coalition of parties than by a small radical party. It breaks out spontaneously among the masses; action instigated by a party can sometimes trigger it off (a rare occurrence), but the determining forces lie elsewhere, in the psychological forces deep in the unconscious of the masses and in the great events of world politics". "No 'resolute minority' can resolve the problems which can only be resolved by the action of the class as a whole". This was a direct criticism of the KPD and the International's representative in Germany, Radek, at that time looking for a rapprochement with the centrist mass party the USPD.

Opportunism Again

Precisely because there was a long process to go through in the west European revolution there was time for this sort of tactical difference to appear. Rapid revolutionary development clarified issues but when a period of relative stagnation set in, "when the masses let anything pass without protest and revolutionary slogans no longer seem to catch the imagination" and especially when the communist party itself remains weak, different perspectives emerge. Pannekoek identifies two main tendencies; "one current seeks to revolutionise and clarify peoples minds by word and deed, and to this end tries to pose the new principles in the sharpest possible contrast to the old, received conceptions. The other current attempts to draw the masses still on the sidelines into practical activity, and therefore emphasises points of agreement rather than points of difference in an attempt to avoid as far as possible anything that might deter them. The first strives for a clear, sharp separation among the masses, the second for unity; the

first current may be termed the radical tendency, the second the opportunist one". Opportunism did not mean mere quietism however; "on the contrary, lack of clear, principled tactics is too often concealed in rabidly strident language; and indeed, in revolutionary situations, it is characteristic of opportunism to suddenly set all its hopes on the great revolutionary deed".

The real problem with opportunism was its concentration on immediate success, defined in an unprincipled way, at the expense of lasting achievement and the final victory. Pannekoek describes opportunist tactics in terms reminiscent of the behaviour of the SPD before the outbreak of the war; it sought alliances with other "progressive" groups, hoping to split the ruling class. But this merely confused the working class and any power gained was illusory as the bourgeoisie was "inwardly united" against the working class.

The reason for opportunism in the period of the Second International was historically explicable. But it was now making an appearance in the Third, Communist, International. With the expulsion of the anti-parliamentarian and anti-trade union left from the KPD, the KPD had approached, at the prompting of Radek and Lenin, the USPD. At the same time, under the stress of the crisis, radical workers still tied to the USPD were pushing it towards the Third International. The gap that had opened up between conscious communist organisations and the rest was closing again. The specifically communist nature of the International movement was being diluted, even abandoned, for the sake of membership numbers. Where many communists "tend to see only the increased strength accruing", Pannekoek saw "an increase in vulnerability". Firmness of principle was vital, for despite the Russian example, revolution was "an extremely complex and arduous process". New, radical, practice was essential but "opportunism in the Third International relies as far as possible upon the forms of struggle taken over from the Second International". It had to be combatted, "the revolution thus develops through the process of internal struggle. It is within the proletariat itself that the resistances develop which must be overcome; and in overcoming them, the proletariat overcomes its own limitations and matures towards communism."

For Pannekoek the party had a very specific role based on the fact that "the contradiction between the rapid economic collapse of capitalism and the immaturity of spirit represented by the power of bourgeois tradition over the proletariat - a contradiction which has not come about by accident, in that the proletariat cannot achieve the maturity of spirit required for hegemony and freedom within a flourishing capitalism - can only be resolved by the process of revolutionary development, in which spontaneous uprisings and seizures of power alternate with setbacks". Given that "a transition period of social and political chaos becomes inevitable", "it cannot be the task of the Communist Party to act the schoolmaster in this upheaval and make vain attempts to truss

it in a strait-jacket of traditional forms; its task is to support the forces of the proletarian movement everywhere, to connect the spontaneous actions together, to give them a broad idea of how they are related to one another, and therefore prepare the unification of the disparate actions and thus put itself at the head of the movement as a whole". Although it was possible that the communist party would be forced to take power prematurely and then lose it again (as in Bremen), "the reconstruction of the economy, inordinately difficult as it will be, is not the main problem for the Communist party. When the proletarian masses develop their intellectual and moral potential to the full, they will resolve it themselves. The prime duty of the Communist Party is to arouse and foster this potential". It had also to "conduct a strong and principled fight" against any transitional form, any government of social party leaders or workers' bureaucracy. "The function of a revolutionary party lies in propagating clear understanding in advance, so that throughout the masses there will be elements who know what must be done and who are capable of judging the situation for themselves".

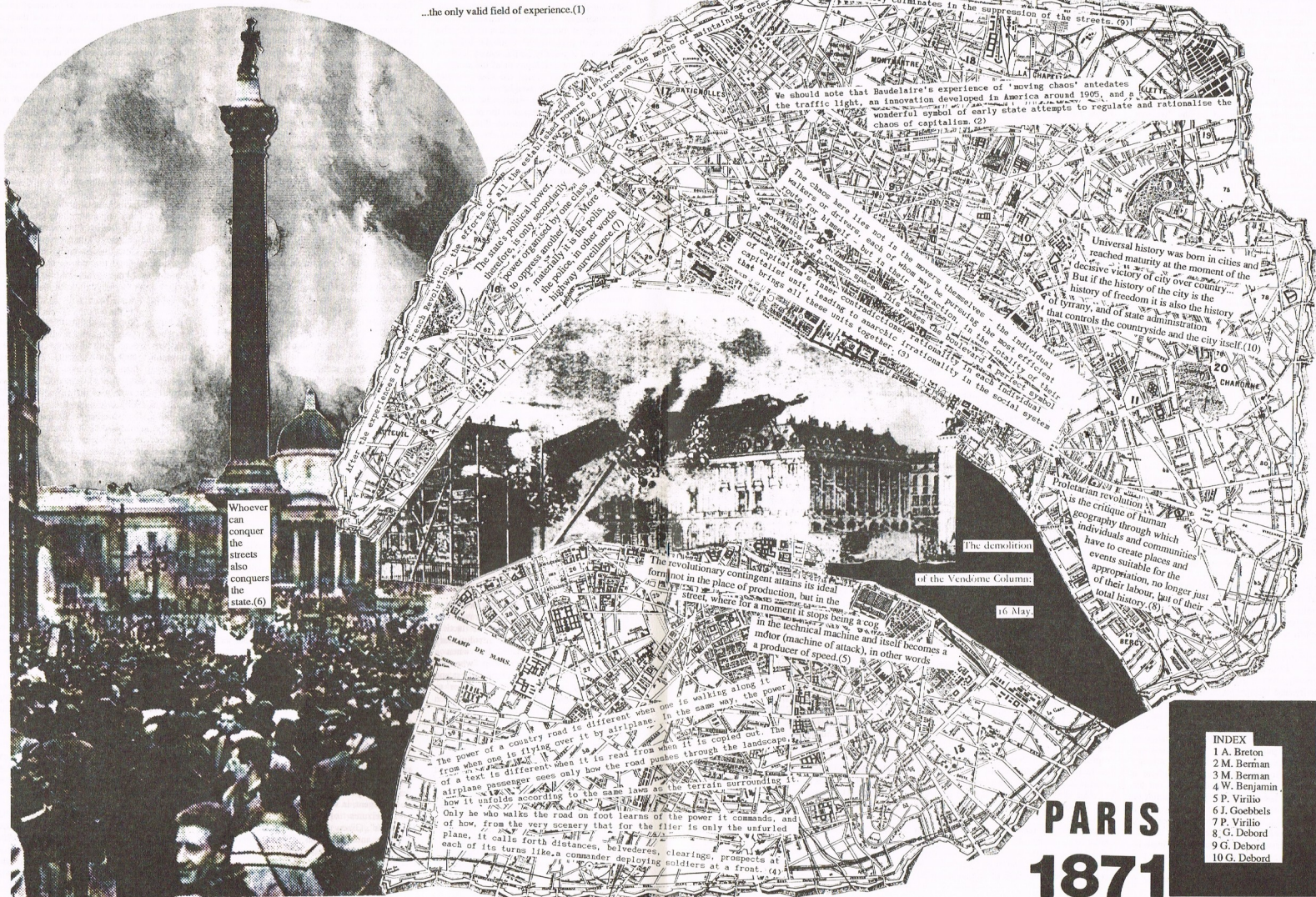
The party comes to lead the struggle because its propaganda, slogans, programme and directives are recognised by the masses as expressing their own aims. Pannekoek recognised that propaganda could be a thankless task during a period of mass inactivity but clarity of principle then would count powerfully in the inevitable periods of struggle. Opportunism watered down principles at such times. It makes no attempt to revolutionise ideas which is the prerequisite for gaining power. "If the most important element of the revolution consists in the masses taking their own affairs - the management of society and production - in hand themselves, then any form of organisation which does not permit control and direction by the masses themselves is counter-revolutionary and harmful". There is no place for ideas of taking over existing traditional organisations or even of working within them, "it was recently argued in Germany that communists must go into parliament to convince the workers that parliamentary struggle is useless - but you don't take a wrong turning to show other people that it is wrong, you go the right way from the outset!"

Exclusion of the Communists

The KAPD was formally excluded from the Third International in September 1921 having already suffered its first serious split. By the time Hitler came to power it barely existed. Pannekoek returned to Holland to take up his astronomical career. He was still important enough to head the Nazis' death list when they invaded. He survived the war in hiding, using his time to write his last lengthy work, Workers' Councils.

Paul Levi, having himself split the KPD, opposed the splitting of the Italian Socialist Party by the International in January 1921 and resigned from the KPD Central Committee. The International pushed the KPD into the 'March Action' in 1921. It was

...the only valid field of experience.(1)



INDEX

- 1 A. Breton
- 2 M. Bernan
- 3 M. Bernan
- 4 W. Benjamin
- 5 P. Virilio
- 6 J. Goebbels
- 7 P. Virilio
- 8 G. Debord
- 9 G. Debord
- 10 G. Debord

PARIS
1871

a shambles, unsupported by the workers and all but destroying the party. Levi was expelled, complaining that the Russians did not understand European conditions. The leadership that had replaced him, Brandier and Thalheimer, was purged after the next debacle, the German "October" of 1923, similarly disorganised by the International (now completely dominated by the Bolsheviks). Fischer and Maslow, who took over, witch-hunted the left from the party but were in their turn purged for the "western European" deviation at the prompting of Zinoviev in late 1925.

The Bolshevik-dominated International conformed completely to Pannekoek's characterisation of opportunism: lack of clear principled tactics, rabidly strident language, setting all its hopes on the "great revolutionary deed". This was not Stalin's Comintern, it was the International of the old Bolsheviks, of Lenin and Trotsky. The charitable might detect a hint of embarrassment in Lenin's attack on his old comrades. Nobody could accuse Trotsky of any such emotion after reading the despicable personal attack, riddled with inaccuracies and deliberate misrepresentation, that he made on Gorter at the Executive Committee of the International in November 1920.

Communist Revolution - A Historical Process and Project

History is difficult stuff. The validity of theory in history is even more difficult to judge. As Pannekoek (after Dietzgen) might have said, the truth of all theory is historically contingent. The temptation is to ask "what if?". What if Lenin had supported the KAPD? Even without the KAPD as a combat organisation the German bourgeoisie never really gained control of German society on their own terms until 1945. What if the 1921 or 1923 KPD uprisings had not been tiny, absurd acts of opportunism but had been properly prepared for, using Pannekoek's insights, KAPD methods? Alas, the only reality is the one that happened. Farce turned to tragedy. The Second International had been unable to prevent the First World War. The Third International was unable to prevent the Second or foment the European revolution. Those who will not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.

By discounting the marxian economics of his time, Pannekoek developed political economy, concentrating on the formation, activity and changes of classes through the historical process. It has been said that it is not Dietzgen himself who is important but what Pannekoek (and the other Dutch marxists) made of him. His understanding of Dietzgen put geist at the centre of Pannekoek's analysis. It is a concept missing from the Bolshevik tradition but without it the working class remain the object not the subject of theory and history. Equipped as he was with the philosophically and scientifically crude "reflection theory" of consciousness, Lenin believed that it was only necessary to change crude material circumstances, the economy, to have this passively reflected by men and women, bringing about communism. In this he was at

one with Kautsky (insofar as Kautsky ever thought about the matter at all). Lenin's great breakthrough and break with Kautsky remained on a political level. He realised the necessity of the complete overthrow of the state and seized the time when the opportunity presented itself. In that he was a great revolutionary. But he wished to build "socialism" with consciousness as it then existed (as he said in *State and Revolution*) and retained a simplistic undialectical and linear conception of the transition period, losing sight of communism in the process.

Pannekoek denied any such possibility in western Europe and there are hints in *WR&CT* where he discusses the bureaucratisation of the new system that he had doubts about the situation even in Russia though the bourgeois influence on the geist of the proletariat there had been slight (but not slight on the party leadership). Certainly in Europe, existing consciousness could not build communism; "the proletariat cannot achieve the maturity of spirit for hegemony and freedom within a flourishing capitalism". From 1917 Pannekoek abandoned "socialism" and identified it as a barrier to be overcome on the road to communism. Between capitalism and communism lies a transition period identified by the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the immediate aftermath of bourgeois domination with the geist formed under that domination, that dictatorship will be embodied in a variety of forms, in a person, clique, a committee, a party, a government. That is not communism (although it may be socialism) although it may be a necessary stage. Pannekoek's theory of consciousness was far more complex than Lenin's, richer and thus so was his theory of the transition. He understood that men and women learn through experience and experience takes time even when aided by the propagation of communist theory. Each person's and the class's working theory of society, conscious or not will only be revolutionised by being found wanting, by not meeting the needs of objective circumstances. The transition covers the period when the class learns that while it may not make history in conditions of its own choosing it does make history and by consciously making history it can achieve communism. The emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself.

Pannekoek made many important theoretical advances. The bureaucratisation of the bolshevised International and of the Bolsheviks themselves and the dominance of their tradition meant that those advances were lost. He realised that imperialism - while not an objective necessity for capital but a result of choices made by human representatives of capital because it was profitable - brought about an objective internationalisation of the working class, just as mass activity, general strike and civil war did, in opposition to the national politics of parliaments. The crisis that resulted from imperialism, a result of a social not an automatic, economic breakdown, brought about the objective necessity for autonomous proletarian activity, so that "the proletariat ceases to be a member of capitalist society

and becomes its destroyer". He realised that once the working class had broken free the bourgeoisie could never rule again in the old way, "nor can the proletariat again be brought into a state of dependence". He realised that the transition began at that point and would not be a linear process; "a simple schema of conquering political power, introducing the council system and then abolishing private commerce, even though this represents the broad outline of development", for this "would only be possible if one could undertake reconstruction in some sort of void". He was no utopian (as some council communists became) for while he believed that some general sort of mental picture of the new society was necessary he was also aware that consciousness did not float in the heads of workers unattached to objective reality, that organisation was necessary and because organisation was based on previous reality and tradition, then the "new form of organisation can itself only be set up in the process of revolution, by workers making a revolutionary intervention".

To repeat the point: in Pannekoek's dialectical theory of the transition no regime between capitalism and communism is, in itself, progressive. Progress is made by the class overthrowing each bureaucratic regime in succession as it fails to reflect the development of the class and this is not going to be a smooth process. Development is by a series of radical ruptures. Near the end of *WR&CT* Pannekoek again breaks with his usual practice and quotes Marx (from the *Eighteenth Brumaire*):

"Proletarian revolutions constantly criticise themselves, continually interrupt themselves in the course of their own development, come back to the seemingly complete in order to start it all over again, treat the inadequacies of their own first attempts with cruelly radical contempt, seem only to throw their adversaries down to enable them to draw new strength from the earth and rise up again to face them all the more gigantic."

Bob Shepherd

I am immensely indebted, almost to the point of plagiarism at times, to messrs Bricianer, Smart, and Gerber and their works listed below. They are not however responsible for precise points of the analysis.

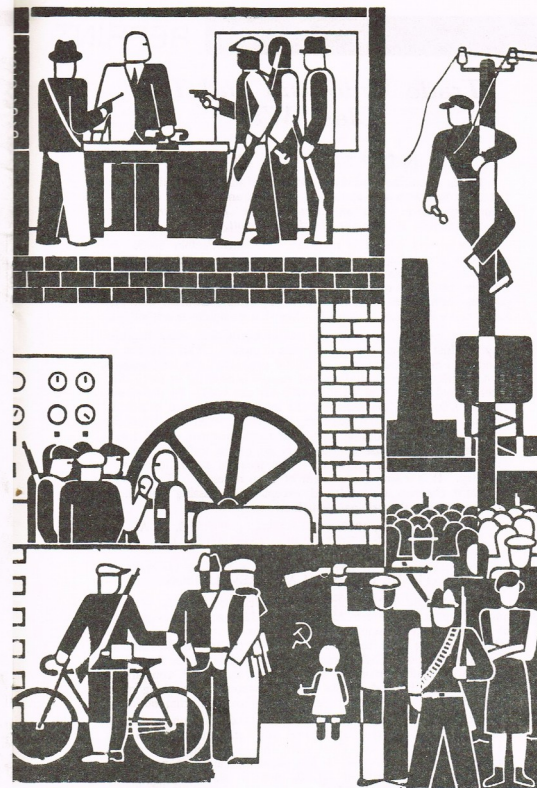
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The current period is one in which communism is supposed to be bankrupt. The recent events in China and the open acceptance of market economics and political democracy by most of Eastern Europe are used by the Western media to convince us that the epoch of communism, which they say began with the Russian revolution of October 1917, is coming to an end.

Yet, shortly after that event critics had already begun to doubt the communist credentials of the new rulers of Russia. From 1921 especially, tendencies emerged which saw the social systems of Russia, and later the rest of Eastern Europe, China etc., as another form of capitalism. Herman Gorter belonged to one such tendency, the German Communist Left.

Gorter's methodical destruction of Lenin's arguments in Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder, has languished in near-total obscurity, at least to the English-speaking world, for nearly seventy years.

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When Guy Aldred heard the news of the 1917 October revolution he was in Brixton prison, a conscientious objector to the capitalist war. Having rejected the February revolution as bourgeois he supported October as proletarian. Aldred's story captures the problems for the communist perspective in the 20th century. It spans the periods firstly when communism could be grasped as a real hope and social possibility, then the triumph of October, and finally the difficulties following the defeat of the revolution. The evident eccentricities in his story should be seen in the light of the disastrous isolation of the communist perspective by the bureaucratised communist parties. Unlike so much of the marxist left in Britain, Aldred maintained an independent intelligence within the perspective of communism. His immediate influence was the SDF and in particular William Morris and Belfort Bax. This independence and his refusal to abandon it for the sake of any revolutionary icon is what makes Aldred's story so interesting. It can be seen in the pamphlet we reprint here where he attempts to come to terms with the phenomenon of trades unionism in the early 20th century. It can also be seen in his later attempts to come to terms with the Soviet Union. In this task he inevitably fails in our terms as he rightly, for the times, rejects the notion of a "workers state" in favour of the characterisation "state capitalist". He had little choice but to come to what is an essentially political conclusion in the absence of an adequate political economy.

Trade Unionism and the Class War (first published 1911) takes up the issue of trades unions from a revolutionary perspective. Its historical interest lies in Aldred's identification of an important change in the role of unions within the capitalist system from "illegal conspiracy" to "bulwark" of that system. The crucial point is that trades unions cannot raise the standard of living of all workers as they are unable to overcome the law of supply and demand overall and their attempts to control supply simply "manufactures" blacklegs.

Aldred's argument is characteristically for the class as a whole. He argues that trades unions certainly do halt the operation of supply and demand in discrete areas, but in favouring some workers make blacklegs of others and cannot encompass the reserve army of labour.

It is significant that Aldred concentrated on the supply/demand approach. This is not due to any esoteric interest in economics on his part but a necessary critique of a widespread ideology in the labour movement. Through the University Extension Movement, the University Settlements (eg Toynbee Hall), Ruskin College and the Workers Educational Association (WEA) a considerable effort was put into the teaching of supply and demand economics to the working class. This was alluded to in *Radical Chains* 1:1 where we introduced a reprint of an article by Noah Ablett which deliberately compared the WEA view - Marshall's marginal economics, with

Trade Unionism and The Class War

AUTHOR'S NOTE (1919 Edition).

Trade Unionism and The Class War was published first in 1911. It met with a great deal of criticism and received one complimentary notice. This was from "Dangle" in the *Clarion*! It was reprinted in 1914 in the *Herald of Revolt*.

The present edition is revised. The introductory section is expanded into a chapter. The third section of the original pamphlet—which would have been the fourth as the essay now stands—treating with the question of representation is omitted. This properly belongs to the companion essay, *Representation and the State*, and will be embodied in it when that pamphlet is revised.

Many persons object to the reasoning of this essay because they consider its logic fatal to all idea of action. This criticism is based on a misunderstanding. I do not deny that men and women must function under capitalism and engage constantly in petty disputes. I only insist that such disputes are not vital. By preaching up dissatisfaction, I am removing the tendency to engage in worthless palliative effort, and hastening the crisis. After all, action which accomplishes nothing, is not of much moment. And trade unionism has accomplished nothing so far as the well-being of the entire working-class is concerned. The plea for revolution is not pedantry. It is a simple statement of stern necessity. The second and third chapters are unaltered, except for a passing word here and there, from the original pamphlet.

London, W., June, 1919.

G. A. A.

I.—TRADE UNIONISM AND REVOLUTION.

The struggle of the Tolpuddle Martyrs for the right of combination under the Reform Ministry of 1832, marks the beginnings of British Trade Unionism. The glamour of romance which belongs to its origin has contributed to its successful development as a social institution. Eight years after the Repeal of the Combination laws, Trade Unionism was deemed an illegal conspiracy. To-day, it is a bulwark of the capitalist system. Something more than tradition is necessary to explain this passage from outlawry to respectability. The explanation is an economic one. Trade Unionism has conquered social power and commanded influence in so far as it satisfied and arose from the social necessities of the capitalist epoch. Because it has answered capitalist needs, the Trade Union has qualified for its modern position as the sign manual of skilled labour.

But the growth in social and political importance of the Trade Union leader has not menaced the foundations of capitalist society. He has been cited more and more as the friend of reform and the enemy of revolution. It has been urged that he is a sober and responsible member of capitalist society. Consequently, capitalist apologists have been obliged to acknowledge that he discharged useful and important functions in society.

This admission has forced them to assert that the law of supply and demand does not determine, with exactness, the nominal—or even the actual—price of the commodity, labour power. Hence it has been allowed that Trade Unions enable their members to increase the amount of the price received for their labour-power, without being hurtful to the interests of the commonwealth—i.e., the capitalist class—when conducted with moderation and fairness.

Modern Trade Unionism enjoys this respectable reputation to a very large extent because it has sacrificed its original vitality. This was inevitable, since, in its very origin, it was reformist and not revolutionary. Trade Unionism has sacrificed no economic principle during its century's development. It has surrendered no industrial or political consistency. But it has not maintained its

early earnestness or sentiment of solidarity. Had it done so, it would have been compelled to have evolved socially and politically. Instead of stagnating in reform, it would have had to progress towards revolution.

The Trade Union apologist, consistently with his reformist outlook, has had to defend the restrictive tendencies of sectional organisation. He has had to deny the revolutionary solidarity of labour in order to defend the Union manufacture of blacklegs. He has rejoiced in a craft organisation that materially injures the interests of labour as a whole, without even benefiting it sectionally. He has shown no qualms about supporting a representative system of administration which betrays the worker to capitalist interests.

All this activity proceeds inevitably from the belief that Trade Unionism benefits the worker economically. It follows naturally from the notion that the worker can improve his social and economic status under capitalism.

Trade Unionism, therefore, is intelligible only on the ground that reform is possible and revolution unnecessary. Industrial palliation, like political palliation, is based on the understanding that no epoch ever attains to a crisis. This is the best that can be said for the necessity of Trade Unionism.

But suppose that the law of supply and demand *does* determine, with exactness, the nominal as well as the actual price of the commodity, labour power?

Then the best that can be said for the necessity of Trade Unionism as opposed to revolutionary communist organisation and action has ceased to possess any meaning.

To develop this economic argument in favour of the social revolution, and against Trade Union reform, is my purpose in writing the present brochure.

II.—THE CASE FOR TRADE UNIONISM.

Nominal wages are actually received in cash, irrespective of the conditions of employment. Actual wages are nominal wages, plus the conditions of employment, hours of labour, etc.

What is the basis of wages?

Marx has asked us to suppose that an average hour of labour be realised in a value equal to sixpence, or twelve average hours of labour realised in six shillings. If, then, in the raw material, machinery and so forth, used up in a commodity, twenty-four hours of average labour were realised, its value would amount to twelve shillings. If, moreover, the workman employed by the capitalist added twelve hours of labour to these means of production these twelve hours would be realised in an additional value of six shillings. The total value of the production would, therefore, amount to thirty-six hours of realised labour-power, and be equal to eighteen shillings. But as the value of labour-power, or the wages paid to the workman, would be three shillings only, no equivalent would have been paid by the capitalist for the six hours of surplus value worked by the workman and realised in the value of the commodity. By selling this commodity at its value for eighteen shillings, the capitalist would, therefore, realise a value of three shillings for which he had paid no equivalent. These three shillings would constitute the surplus value or profit pocketed by him. Any increase in the wages of the workers must reduce the amount of his surplus value, since that is the only fund out of which such increase could be obtained. It is possible for the wages of the workman to rise so high as not only approximately to equal the value of his product, but *actually* to equal it. In a word, if the law of supply and demand works with the inexactness assumed by the Trade Unionist to be the case, palliation is not merely justifiable on the grounds of expediency; it is the direct path to emancipation.

Is it true that the law of supply and demand fixes the price with so little exactness, that supply and demand become equal not at an exact point of price? May it be that several prices, or a range of prices, will satisfy the requirements of the law? That

the marxist labour theory of value of the Plebs League. The importance of "educating" the working class was such that bourgeois ideologues of the calibre of Alfred Marshall, H.Llewellyn-Smith and J.A.Hobson, amongst many others, were involved.

While Aldred's analysis, founded on the independent viewpoint of the working class itself, has a general validity its conclusions cannot be wholly accepted today. Aldred was writing in 1911 when the idea of revolutionary solidarity was very real. Today we have to look back on many decades of trades union activity within state bounds. The overall success of this strategy from the point of view of the bourgeoisie derives from the ability of the trades unions to achieve a degree of coordination between accumulation and the regime of needs. They ensure that the necessary wage is not reduced to the level of penury.

The publication of this article in 1911 was almost certainly a contribution to the debate on the role of trades unions stimulated by the (anarcho-) syndicalist hopes for industrial unions. Aldred's views parallels that of European marxists such as Pannekoek in the same period expressed in the Massenkation Debate out of which developed the communist perspectives of the European revolutionary period. Aldred broadly shared those perspectives and was certainly in contact with the European revolutionary left when he decided to reprint his article in 1919. Whether he was aware of European developments and the positions of the various factions when he originally wrote it we cannot say but with or without direct cross-fertilisation it is obvious that the concerns were international in scope even if bourgeois state responses to the working class took different forms in that period.

Guy Alfred Aldred was born in Clerkenwell, London on 5th November 1886. His father, a naval officer, had deserted his mother immediately after the marriage ceremony and Guy was brought up in the house of his maternal grandfather, Charles Holdsworth, a bookbinder and Victorian radical. Although Charles was an atheist, his wife Emma was a High Church Anglican, and Aldred was given a religious upbringing.

At the age of 10, Aldred formed an Antinicotine League among his classmates and later induced them to sign a pledge not to indulge in strong drink. His grandfather opposed the Boer War and took Guy to political meetings carrying placards. His religious connections led Guy to become the "Holloway Boy Preacher". He opposed war from a religious standpoint, producing in June 1902, the pamphlet: *The Last Days: War or Peace?* This pamphlet was produced after the end of the Boer War in anticipation of a new war breaking out.

Over the next four years he progressed from High Church conformity, through theism, agnosticism, Free-thought, to atheistic socialism. Friends included George Martin, an ordained Anglican priest, who worked as a porter in Borough Market and advanced Guy's education in theology and philosophy,

and Charles Voysey, the former vicar of Healaugh who had been indicted before the Privy Council in 1871 on a charge of heresy. Aldred attended various Institutions including the Sunday Morning Adult School meetings at the Peel Institute where he read Blatchford's *Clarion*, and met John Burns of the SDF (travelling at that time in the opposite political direction). In 1904 he heard Daniel DeLeon speak on industrial unionism on Clerkenwell Green and while this interested him enough to seek out the London branch of the Socialist Labour Party, his primary interest was still Free-thought.



In March 1905 Aldred joined the SDF, becoming the parliamentary correspondent for *Justice* in January 1906. He resigned this post in May, having decided that parliament was a farce. He announced his conversion to anti-parliamentarianism in a letter to *Justice* on the 26th of May (in *For Communism*, published in 1935, he noted 'Anti-parliamentarianism as distinct from Anarchism, was pioneered in Britain by William Morris. He was seconded by Belfort Bax'). He was unpopular with the party elders and split with the SDF in June of the same year over the question of propagating atheism from SDF platforms. The party leaders were opposed to this, and only Belfort Bax defended his position.

Aldred went on to write for *The Voice of Labour*, the journal of the Freedom Group. This introduced him to the anarchist club in Jubilee Street where Kropotkin sometimes spoke. At the invitation of Rudolf Rocker, Aldred deputised for Kropotkin when the latter was unavailable. At this time Aldred sympathised with Proudhon's contention that universal suffrage was reactionary and tended to argue that differences between Marx and Bakunin had been exaggerated. Despite his disagreement with Bakunin's conception of the state, when he set up his own press, Aldred called it the Bakunin Press. In 1906 he wrote two articles for *Freedom* on the philosophy of anarcho-communism. The prevailing influence on the Freedom group

there is, or may be, a kind of table-land within which the law does not operate? Let us take the Trade Union political economists' typical example. A hundredweight of fish is sold by Dutch Auction, i.e., the seller bidding down instead of the buyers bidding up. One buyer may be willing to give 20s. for the lot, and no other buyer willing to give more than 18s., and the man who is willing to give 20s. will get the fish at 18s. or a fraction over it. So that in the same market, with the same quantity of fish for sale, and with customers in number and every other respect the same, the same lot of fish might fetch two very different prices, the law of supply and demand being equally and completely fulfilled by either of these prices. Within a limit of 2s. the law is inoperative.

It is claimed, that in a case such as this, much depends on who has the initiative in bargaining. In the instance given, the possessor of the initiative gives to the seller a distinct gain of 2s., not accounted for by the law of supply and demand. Supposing the price of labour-power to fall within a similarly excepted category, the same principle as operated against the buyer in the case of the Dutch Auction will now operate against the seller in the labour market. It is the buyer who has the initiative in fixing the price. The employer, the purchaser of labour-power, makes the offer of wages. The dealer or seller, i.e., the labourer, accepts or refuses. The advantage of the initiative is with the employer therefore. This can only be modified by a close combination among the employed, whereby they may place a reserve price on their labour. Under these circumstances Organised Labour may secure a larger positive amount of the produce of its labour-power, within the limits not covered by the law of supply and demand. It may, therefore, secure the economic equivalent of culture by virtue of its organised status.

Outside of this table-land the law of supply and demand remains intact. The more numerous the competitors for employment the lower will the wages be, other things being equal. This fact forces on the attention of the Trade Unionists the necessity for restrictive rules, forbidding the employment of non-unionists and limiting the number of apprentices. Such rules are indispensable to the complete efficacy of Trade Unionism. They make the Trade Unionist the apologist for an aristocracy of skilled labour.

Trade Unionism's final refuge is Malthusianism. Its specious pretence is that the ignorant and untrained part of the proletariat will people up to the point that will keep their wages at that miserable rate which the low scale of their ideas and habits makes endurable to them. As long as their minds remain in such a state, the Unionist claims that he does them no real injury in preventing them from competing with him for employment. He only saves himself from being brought down to their level. He does no wrong by entrenching himself behind a barrier to exclude those whose competition would bring down his wages, without more than momentarily raising theirs.

Again, even were it to be shown that Trade Unionism did not increase the nominal rate of wages, it has to be admitted (says the Unionist) that it is able to do much by raising the actual rate of wages. Its least accomplishment is to successfully resist irritating, arbitrary, and oppressive conditions of employment.

But the power of the organisation of labour in this direction turns upon its recognition. In times of dispute there may be room for negotiations between employers and employed upon the question of maximum or minimum demands. For the Trade Union to be effectual there can be no room for compromise on the question of recognising the Union and receiving the Union official representatives. This limits all need or apprehension of a strike to such recognition. So that the right of combination recognised, the men's demands become a matter of amicable arrangement.

Such is the case for Trade Unionism. We now propose to expose its fallacies, and lay bare its hypocrites.

III.—THE WORKERS' CASE AGAINST TRADE UNIONISM.

The reply to the argument which I have developed in defence of Trade Unionism in the foregoing section, naturally divides itself into the following division:—

(1) *The operation of the economic law against the possibility of palliation, so far as the entire working-class is concerned:*—Although it is true that the law of supply and demand does not fix the terms of any particular bargain, the operation of that law does not finish with the conclusion of that particular bargain. This has been clearly demonstrated by Cree in his reply to Müll. According to whether buyer or seller secures what is termed "a bargain," demand or supply is checked or stimulated. This applies to the Dutch Auction Fish Sale. A sale of 20s. would tend to stimulate future supply and check demand. The consequent tendency would be towards a fall in price. A sale of 18s. would tend to bring out more buyers and reduce the inducement to go to sea. The consequent tendency would be towards a rise in price. This would bring out more sellers and reduce the number of buyers once more. This is true also of the wages of labour. Higher wages bring out more workers but reduce the employer's profits. So that the employer becomes less anxious to secure workers. A lower wage has the reverse effect. The worker now becomes less anxious to be employed. But the employer is more willing to employ. Once more there is repetition. Working by tendency only, the economic law approaches exactitude over a multiplicity of cases, but not in any particular case. The means of the oscillations of price is now an exact point, not a range of prices. The terms of any particular bargain are, consequently, only of the most transient importance even to those immediately concerned. But they are of little or no importance to the workers or employers as a class, since they are constantly being brought back to their true economical point. The compensating influences being inevitable and automatic, it will be seen that, in its position as a class, the working-class has nothing to gain from Trade Union Palliative activity. Its only practical hope, as well as its beautiful day-dream, is, first, last, and all-the-time, Socialism—the Communal Individualism of which Oscar Wilde made himself the prophet in that magnificent book, *The Soul of Man*.

(2) *The impossibility of raising actual wages without regard to nominal wages:*—Mavor has put the case in a nutshell. If a reduction of the hours of labour results in decreased production, wages will fall, other things being equal. If reduction of hours results in maintenance of production per man there will be no additional employment, other things being equal. The equality of other things turn upon the law of supply and demand which palliative combination does not effect. Consequently, Trade Unionism can neither effect wages nor yet the question of employment.

(3) *The impossibility of organising the whole of labour on the basis of Trade Unionism:*—The Trade Unionist, when excluding the blackleg and manufacturing him, pretends to look forward to a complete federation of labour. But if all labour stands upon the platform of palliative combination—a very different thing from revolutionary solidarity—the effect will be nil, in view of the operations of the law of supply and demand. A union of all labour is as good as no union at all from the palliationist viewpoint. Even a "minimum wage" of higher rate than at present established means only the decreased purchasing power of money. Between labour-power as a commodity and other commodities there exists a definite ratio of exchange. So that a "minimum wage" is meaningless. But a union of all labour on the basis of Trade Unionism is impossible. With all trades organised on a restricted basis it would be impossible for any trade to rid itself of its surplus by causing them to be absorbed into any other trade. But for Trade Unionism to succeed—with the increasing use of machinery and the consequent reduction of skilled to unskilled labour—it must also organise unskilled labour. Such organisation to succeed must be even more restrictive than in the case of skilled labour. Unskilled labour cannot, therefore, absorb the surplus from all the skilled trades. Not only so, but to this surplus it would add an enormous surplus of its own. So that restrictive Unionism can only result in first deluding the working-class, then betraying it, and finally reducing the greater portion of it to blackleg in the present and future.

(4) *The menace of Trade Union Representation; A question of Labour Leading:*—Trade Unionism embodies the menace of the representative system in its constitution no less certainly than the legislative machine. Its elected leaders conclude strikes and dis-

was still Kropotkin, who Aldred held had abandoned revolutionary Bakuninism and become the patron of "drawing-room anarchism".

In 1907 Aldred, together with John Turner and other associates on the *Voices of Labour*, formed the Industrial Union of Direct Action. The aims of the IUDA was to operate in the interests of social revolution in order to bring in to being a decentralised federation of communes. Its weapon was to be the general strike and violence was to be used only in self-defence. However Aldred quarrelled with Turner, accusing him of promoting ordinary trades-unionism. He simultaneously attacked the Freedom group on similar grounds.

While involved with the IUDA Aldred was also busy promoting another organisation, the Communist Propaganda Group (CPG). This was the first organisation in Britain to use the word "communist" in its title. In later years Aldred was to reflect: "the reader will understand that the author termed himself 'a communist' in 1906. He uses the term in the sense he employed it, in the sense that William Morris employed it, the sense of world harmony, social love, and commonweal" (Forward to *Studies in Communism*). The CPG published a 21 point programme which rejected palliative industrial action as being as reactionary as palliative political action, both equally diverting the workers from communism. Rejecting both industrial action and parliamentarism, the CPG called for "the organisation of the workers into one INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST PARTY within, but antagonistic to, the capitalistic states". In a pamphlet published in 1909, *Bourgeois Sectarianism* Aldred also called for a "New Communist International". In another pamphlet published in 1909, *Organisation*, he again called for a new International, arguing that following the fall of the First International, marxist communism had been supplanted internationally by Lassalean social-democracy.

From his grandfather Aldred had gained an awareness of the early 19th century struggle of libertarians for freedom to organise, and to speak and write critically of the powers that be. The influence of this liberal-radical tradition led Aldred to publish in 1909 *The Indian Sociologist* the organ of the Free India Society, after it had been suppressed when the Indian student, Mardalal Dhangra assassinated Sir Carson Wilde to further Indian freedom. While Aldred opposed political assassinations, nationalism and its concomitant statism, he also opposed the suppression of opinion. He gained no support from the socialist movement and only Rudolf Rocker defended him against allegations about his motives. He did however win the support of Sir Walter Strickland, an opponent of imperialism. This publication cost Aldred 12 months imprisonment.

On his release from prison in 1910, Aldred published a new paper, *The Herald of Revolt: An Organ of the Coming Socialist Revolution*. The first issue appeared in

December. In 1912 he spoke in Glasgow to various audiences, including the Anarchist Group, who had emerged from the collapse of William Morris's Socialist League in 1895. Under Aldred's influence, a split from the anarchists set itself up as the Glasgow Communist Group.

In May of 1914 the *Herald of Revolt* changed its name to *The Spur*, "because the workers need a spur". This took an anti-war position. Aldred even opposed the Clyde Workers' Committee on the grounds that it sought only to improve the workers' economic position, and did not develop any kind of class opposition to the war. He was arrested on April 14th 1916 for failing to report for military service (although he had not in fact been called-up). He spent most of the war in prison, some of it under "open arrest" at a labour camp at Dyce near Aberdeen. Here, together with Bonar Thompson and E.T. Jope, he set up a Men's Committee to try to change hours of work and published the *Granite Echo* as the "organ of the Dyce C.O.s". Aldred managed to speak at public meetings and his paper was sold not only in the camp but in Aberdeen, Glasgow and London. He was in Brixton prison when the news of the October Revolution arrived. Here he met Tchicherin, soon to be appointed Russian representative in England. Tchicherin explained that the revolution was not an anarchist-communist uprising but the work of an organisation called "the Bolsheviks" who had a leader named Lenin.



On his release from prison in January 1919 (after a six-day hunger strike), Aldred toured the country with Henry Sara calling for a union of anti-parliamentary groups and the left of the ILP to form a British Communist Party affiliated to the Third International. He fully agreed with the dictatorship of the proletariat as a temporary expedient and supported "war communism". He read Lenin's *State and Revolution* at this time (December 1919). Reviewing it, he wrote

putes by consenting to terms of compromise offered by Capitalistic Ministers for Labour, and Presidents of the Board of Trade. To pretend that such terms of agreement are antagonistic to capitalist interests, is to be disturbed by a bogey. On the other hand, for what does the strike-leader generally strive? To get his authority recognised. This is the first step to position and power. It is pretended that the greater the support given to the labour-leader the greater the concession he can wring from the capitalist class. It is forgotten that the greater the confidence reposed in him, the more effectually he can betray that confidence. Consequently, your "official" strike-leader is always for "enthusiasm and earnestness" of the "slow and sure" variety. His plea is for caution, which means that he is to be allowed to do the bargaining but not to be submitted to criticism. Criticism he regards as a menace to his authority. It certainly reduces his selling-out value.

(5) *The Initiative Absurdity*:—The Trade Unionist argument that the unorganised worker suffers from not having the initiative is nonsense. Rather—if it really counted, which it does not—one's sympathy should be with the employer, who uses it against the unorganised worker. In the case of the *organised* Trade Unionist, it should be with the worker who is menaced by having it used on his behalf by the labour leader who generally succeeds in misrepresenting him. Everyone knows that employers often throw the onus of initiative on the worker. In a bargain both buyer and seller are anxious only to avoid it. "What do you want?" says the buyer. "That is not the question, what will you give?" replies the seller. Both parties are desirous of securing a bargain, and consequently avoid the initiative. It has no advantages although it operates very little one way or the other in the labour market. So that Trade Unionism has nothing to offer the worker in this respect.

On these counts, therefore, and for these reasons, Trade Unionism must go. The only hope of the workers on the industrial, as on the political field, is Revolutionary Socialism.

IV.

THE QUESTION OF REPRESENTATION.

Much that has been urged in the present brochure has tended to negate the idea of majority rule, as also the representation principle. Like most rebels—and, for that matter, most students of history—I have no faith in the majority, less unbelief in the minority, and most reliance in the individual. Thomas Paine regarded Government as being, like dress, a badge of lost innocence. He also looked upon the abolition of formal government as the beginning of true association. This seems to me to be incontrovertible. Consequently, if my opinion be correct, representation, as an expression of formal government, can have no weight, and must necessarily play a small part in the revolutionary birth-struggle of the proletarian commonweal.

To bring this theory down to the realm of the practical, I want the reader to consider the following case which has often been put to me in the course of debates and discussions in which I have played the part of principal. It has been said that if a certain individual was working in a shop where sixty men were employed, and fifty wished to come out on strike whilst ten wished to remain in, the author of this hypothetical case was in favour of coercing the ten and making them come out, whilst the fifty fought the "boss." Such coercion, it is urged, alone will rid the proletariat of their subjection to the capitalist and Capitalism.

From this opinion I venture to differ. Indeed, I repeat in print what I have often urged on the platform, in reply to the hypothetical case already enunciated that the majority have no more right to coerce a minority than the minority have to coerce a majority. The fifty have no more right to coerce the ten, than the ten have to coerce the fifty, since in relation to society, the hypothetical fifty strikers are but a small minority, and if it be true that many are right where few are wrong, then the presence of seventy strike-breakers in the neighbourhood of the strike plus seventy soldiers, would entitle the "majority" of 150 men, as opposed to the minority of fifty, to "coerce them" out of the neighbourhood. Herein lies the capitalist apology for Mitchelstown, Featherstone, Homestead, Belfast, and every other scene of the patriotic murder of the working-class by the hired assassins of profit mongers. For it must be remembered, that we are not treating of the ethics of

coercion in relation to oppressed minorities, but of the economics of apparent majorities' rights to coerce a minority.

If we were to consent to deal with probabilities rather than with fact, it would be urged that the one hundred and fifty men do not represent society, nor the whole working-class, for it is probable that the latter would stand by the fifty. Yet every worker, as also every employer, knows that the news of the strike could be flashed throughout the length and breadth of the land, without the official sounderism which imported blacklegs being denounced to the extent of all the workers striking in sympathy and thus threatening to coerce the blacklegs who were in a minority. With all their feelings of sympathy and faithful devotion to the cause of united endeavour it would be impossible for the whole working-class organisations to exhibit industrial solidarity.

If all the workers were willing to strike, they need only stay in work and take over the means and instruments of production for their own use. Revolution would replace a mere industrial struggle. The workers would not be concerned with craft or industrial divisional organisation, nor with the local coercion of blacklegs, nor with the propaganda-strike even, but with the emancipation of their class only. The struggle would be constructive, not negative. There would be no necessity for "physical force" coercion of blacklegs, since the economic existence of gentlemen of this fraternity would be impossible under such circumstances. If all the workers were educated up to that stage of economic solidarity, that they were willing to strike in sympathy and massacre blacklegs according to Union-laid regulations, the working-class revolution would be international and spontaneous. There would be no strike for higher nominal, or for higher actual, wages; only the coming together of the workers internationally for the political and industrial overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and the taking of whatever united industrial and political activity the Class War demanded by way of its culminating expression.

If the workers declined to strike in sympathy, it would be because they did not sympathise industrially with the revolting fifty. Yet, as consumers and fellow wage slaves, by the logic of economic production and distribution, they would be affected alike by the existence of the strike and its termination. The question as to whether they were right in passively siding with the employees does not enter into the problem as stated by the pseudo-proletarian defender of representation. The only question is the right of the majority.

By refusal, the majority have shown that they are opposed to this gentleman and his forty-nine imaginary colleagues. His position is altered slightly, and the manifesto of the resolute fifty now is addressed to the whole of the rest of the working-class, which is engaged not in striking in sympathy, but in passively siding with local minority of blacklegs and the Capitalist class. The manifesto, therefore, should run: "Being in a shop where sixty men are at work, and fifty of us want to strike, and ten do not, I am in favour of coercing the ten and making them come out, while we fifty fight the 'boss.' As the rest of the working-class and the whole of the Capitalist class side with the 'boss' and the ten non-strikers, I am in favour of coercing the majority of my own class and the whole of the Capitalist class also."

What would be society's answer? Why, that of the Trade Union-apologist-or-strike-believer-in-majority righteousness! Thus, a worker who was not in favour of the striker would say:—"If I am in a society where a vast majority of the proletariat can have their present ill-being intensified, and poverty added to their poverty, by fifty men going on strike, I am in favour of coercing the fifty and making them go back to work, whilst we, the majority of the workers, meet the 'boss' through our representatives on arbitration and conciliation boards, and through peaceful agencies, secure higher wages and better conditions."

Maybe the revolting strike defender would turn aside, with his sturdy band of followers, numbering forty-nine all told, and, sighing somewhat critically, relieve his feelings by giving utterance to the following piece of philosophy: "The majority have no more right to coerce a minority than the minority have to coerce a majority. The fifty have no more right to coerce the ten than the ten have to coerce the fifty. Society has no more right to coerce the fifty strikers than the fifty strikers have to coerce society. But

that Lenin "in showing the revolutionary oneness of all that is essential in Marx with all that counts in Bakunin, has accomplished a wonderful work" (Worker, 13.12.19). In 1920, in the *Sput*, he added "no man can be really and truly an Anarchist without becoming a Bolshevik ... no man can be really and truly be a Bolshevik without standing boldly and firmly on the Anarchist platform". However, he opposed Lenin's "revolutionary parliamentarism" and refused to take part in unity talks with organisations who adhered to this tactic. Aldred settled in Glasgow in 1920. In October of that year the Glasgow Communist Group, with which he was involved, suspended its support for the Comintern on the question of parliamentarism and criticised those, like Pankhurst (and the WSF) who thought it was possible to work inside the Third International and push it to the left. Aldred was instrumental in forming the Anti-parliamentary Communist Federation (A-PCF) in 1921 as a direct challenge to the Moscow supporting and supported CPGB.

Aldred, unlike Pankhurst and unlike the European, especially German and Dutch, left communists, still regarded "revolutionary parliamentarism" merely as a tactical error forced on Lenin by circumstances, rather than as a tactic complementary to NEP and what Pankhurst called "the reversion to capitalism" in the USSR. It was not until November 1925 that he accepted that anarchists were being persecuted in Russia and stopped slandering those, like Emma Goldman, who drew attention to the fact. He then adopted the WSF's characterisation of the USSR as "state capitalist" and the Comintern as an agent of "Russian capitalism".

By the mid-1920s it had become clear that revolution was not an immediate possibility. The WSF's *Workers Dreadnought* ceased publication leaving the A-PCF the only representative of anti-parliamentarism. Aldred spent much of the 1920s and early '30s campaigning for free speech on Glasgow Green. With the rise of Fascism in Germany Aldred restricted his attacks on parliamentarism. He quit the A-PCF in 1933, briefly joining the ILP before setting up the Workers' Open Forum and the United Socialist Movement (USM). In a *Socialist May Special* in 1934, he declared "the attack on parliamentarism must give place to the attack on the anti-parliamentarian product of parliamentarism: Fascism! Today our cry must be: Division is dangerous!" He began to argue that the question of parliamentarism or anti-parliamentarism was secondary to the attacks on the working class as a whole, hence his slogan: "The proletariat anti-parliamentary or the proletariat anti-parliamentary but the proletariat united!"

Aldred spent the 1930s trying to forge socialist unity, both nationally between the USM and the A-PCF, and internationally. In 1935 he tried to bring together the Communist Workers' International based in Amsterdam, Paul Mattick's United Workers' Party (UWP) and the Trotskyist Communist League of Struggle (CLS). He believed the last was evolving towards anti-parliamentarism. However the UWP refused

to work with the CLS, criticised Aldred for being "incapable of seeing the real differences between these groups" and declared its intention to "have nothing to do with people of Aldred's stamp". His attitude to Trotskyism was unstable. In the 20s he had declared that the trotskyist opposition stood "on the same platform as Stalin". At the same time he supported Trotsky's right to engage in political activity wherever he chose and to return to Russia (because of what Aldred viewed as his heroic role in the Russian revolution). At one point he stated his agreement with Trotsky on the nature of the USSR when he mistakenly thought that Trotsky held a state-capitalist view.

In 1934 he published two articles on the USSR by Trotsky, as *The Soviet Union and the Fourth International*. For a while he adopted the "workers' state" position, denying that the bureaucracy was a class, but by the end of 1934 he was again saying that it was nonsense to deny that Russia was capitalist. In *For Communism* (1935) Aldred criticised Trotsky's belief that degeneration had set in only with the death of Lenin, tracing it back to the NEP in 1921.

The outbreak of the Spanish civil war threw the anti-parliamentarians into confusion. Both the A-PCF and Aldred's USM initially called for support for the republican government, criticizing the British government for its neutrality in the struggle between democracy and fascism. It was not until Ethel MacDonald and Jane Patrick went to Spain on behalf of the USM, that the USM's line changed. Impressed by the autonomous struggles of the working class against fascism, MacDonald spole of the civil war as "the living demonstration of the power of the proletariat, the living truth of the force of direct action." (*News From Spain* 1 May 1937). Taking up this line, Aldred urged workers to "face Fascism with determination, industrial solidarity, and the Social General Strike" (*Regeneration* 21 February 1937).

In the early stages of the struggle, Aldred quarrelled with the A-PCF and with Emma Goldman over who should be the British representatives of the CNT-FAI. However, in May 1937 the USM and the A-PCF cooperated in producing the *Barcelona Bulletin*, one of the first publications in Britain to discuss the "May Days" in Barcelona from a non-stalinist viewpoint. Further, when MacDonald was imprisoned by the Generalitat for possession of revolutionary literature and an out of date residence permit, the A-PCF took the initiative in forming an Ethel MacDonald Defence Committee, in which the USM also participated. After MacDonald's release the committee folded, but campaigns in support of the CNT-FAI and POUM prisoners and refugees were continued even after the end of the civil war.

His attitude to the show trials was hard-line. When at the end of 1937 a Socialist Anti-Terror Committee was formed in Glasgow, the USM participated (along with the A-PCF, ILF, and the Revolutionary Socialist Party). On the other hand in *The Word*, May 1938, he said "the Stalinist conspiracies are

law of social evolution, I believe in conserving all the principles of past progress in the direction of liberty. And freedom, so far as economic tendencies permit, I hold to be such a principle. Indeed, the fact that I have to so qualify it, means that the right of freedom is admitted, with rare, if any, exceptions, so long as the economic *status quo* is not disturbed.

Though the expression of the Class struggle will be political, its basis will be economic, so that it can no longer be willed into a physical force one. It does not require that the reader should agree with me on this point for him to realise that no prerogative to murder, boycott, or coerce is specially invested in the majority, because the deity of abstract rights has decided that the majority is the majority. If coercion be right, its successfulness must decide its employment. Successful or otherwise, it is no more right for the minority than the majority to coerce, and neither more nor less obligatory upon it not to do so.

This is my position—as a Socialist—of equal rights for majority and minority, which, being recognised, would not lead to the hopeless confusion that majority rule does. It is a confusion of bourgeois begetting, leading to the experiences of Motherwell, Hull, Grimsby, Featherstone, Penrhyn, Mitchelstown, and Belfast. The negation of the alleged right of majority violence is based upon the economics of the Class War.

Our Trade Unionist friend, with his loose revolutionary violence and threatening, as opposed to a sound revolutionary activity, finding himself either consciously or unconsciously on the side of bourgeois society, will insist that there must be representation and delegation of authority.

To this I reply with the statement of Marxian philosophy, that every industrial epoch has its own system of representation. The fact that minority and majority rule find their harmonious expression in the political bureaucratic autocracy of capitalism signifies that its negation in the terms of Socialism shall embody a counter affirmative which embody the principle of true organisation and freedom of the individual idiosyncrasy. What the details of that organisation will be shall be made the subject of discussion in another essay. That it will not be "a Socialist majority" can be seen from the fact that democracy usually signifies the surrender of majority incompetence and mis-education to the interests of minority expertism and bourgeois concentration of its power over the lives and destinies of the exploited proletarians, no less through the medium of the worker's Trade and Industrial Union, than through that of the Capitalist State.

Marx truly conceived of the bourgeois State as being but an executive committee for administering the affairs of the whole bourgeois class, which has stripped of its halo every profession previously venerated and regarded as honourable, and thus turned the minority has as much right to coerce the majority as the majority has to coerce the minority. Ten strikers have as much right to coerce fifty non-strikers as fifty strikers have to coerce ten non-strikers. And society has as much right, and no more, to coerce fifty strikers as fifty strikers have to coerce society. Where might reigns rights do not exist. Where the political reflex of industrial complexity is centralization of control and administration, individual autonomy is impossible. The only question is: Seeing that the emancipation of the working-class means the emancipation of the world, and that we base our argument on logic and reason; that by quiet and resolute activity the workers can be brought together in one revolutionary 'Impossible' movement to tie up the workshops of the world, amid the anathemas and violence of impotent Capitalism struggling in its death-throes; that violence against *our own class* can never atone for the violence of the capitalist against us, but only make for an orgie of bloodshed which will delay the sure and certain overthrow of parasitism; seeing, in fact, that Socialism is inevitable and that the very oppression of the working-class constitutes its final economic and political strength, is extraneous violence, i.e., an interference with the liberty of the strike-breaker by virtue of physical force above and beyond the law of economic effect in production, distribution, and consumption, advisable in the interests of the workers to-day, and the securement of the common-wealth for which they are striving?"

This, I repeat, is the question which our physical force constitutional palliationist, supposing he understood the situation, would ask himself.

My reply—since I own no arsenals, have no monopoly of galling or Maxim guns, and am not a Nonconformist Cabinet Minister—would be “no,” especially since, in accordance with the doctor, lawyer, priest, poet, philosopher, and labour leader into its paid wage workers. The Trade Union becomes daily more and more an essential department or expression of the bourgeois State.

Out of the class or property social system there cannot emerge a “representation” which signifies an honest attempt to secure just exposition of principles and expressions of antagonistic interests. Where there is no social or economic equality, there can be no democracy and no representation. The barren wilderness of money-juggling “freedom” cannot secure real personal liberty of being to any citizen. True organisation like true liberty belongs to the future—and the Socialist Commonwealth: or, as I have termed it elsewhere, the Anarchist Republic.



Guy Aldred with the Banner of the United Socialist Movement in the 1930s. It claims Jesus as 'The First C.C.' (Conscientious Objector).

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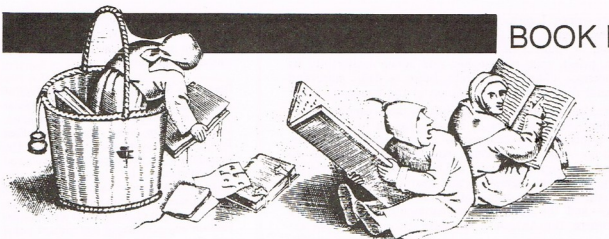
1930
GLASGOW:
The Strickland Press, 104 George Street, C.I.
Bakunin Press, Bakunin Hall, 29 Castle St., C.A.

but the continuation of methods used in Trotsky's time. Zinoviev, and those who were parties to the Kronstadt massacre, reaped what they helped to sow."

During the Second World War, as editor of *The Word*, Aldred allowed space to labour movement politicians such as Creech Jones, John McGovern, Rhys Davies and Fred Jowett, who opposed the war. His commitment to free speech and professed anti-sectarianism led him to open his columns to Alexander Ratcliffe, secretary of the anti-semitic Scottish Protestant League, and to the Duke of Bedford, an apologist for Fascism and advocate of a negotiated peace with Germany. He apparently held Bedford in high esteem and in August 1941 suggested a socialist-pacifist coalition with Bedford at its head. He responded to criticism by stressing the need for free speech and anti-sectarianism.

Aldred continued to edit *The Word* and stand in local and general elections as an anti-parliamentary candidate until his death in October 1962.

BOOK REVIEWS



Toni Negri, *The Revolution Retrieved* (Red Notes 1988), and *The Politics of Subversion* (Polity Press, 1989).

The recent publication of two collections of the writing of Toni Negri constitutes an important contribution to communist literature available in the English language. Negri's work develops out of the workerist-autonomist milieu which developed in Italy during the 1960s and '70s as an attempt to understand the nature of class struggles in contemporary capitalism and the potential which they revealed for the communist project. Those same struggles which have led many to abandon marxism, communism, and the concept of class, served, in Italian conditions, to initiate a rethinking of communist theory. This was done without falling back into dogmatic and arid reassertions of "orthodoxy" but avoided abandoning Marx or revolution, and it is in this sense that Negri's work, primarily, needs to be considered seriously by an English language readership.

There is a difference between the Italian marxist tradition to which Negri belongs and that of the British left. Despite the (often convoluted) attempts of *New Left Review* to inject British marxism with innovative theory, Britain's major contributions to marxist thought remain principally empirical and historical (which is not, given its context, a bad thing). The fact that, of Marx's works, it is *Capital* with its close reference to the Parliamentary blue books, which is regarded as the most informative and important is symptomatic of British communist culture.

One reason for the empirical tendency of the best British marxism is the nature of capitalist development in Britain, and the early formation of a working class, which has rarely considered marxist theory to be an essential weapon in its struggles. Italian marxism has historically been more explicitly theoretical than its British counterpart, and this is in part explicable in terms of the more rapid and recent development of the Italian working class, who have consequently demanded more of marxist theory than has been the case in Britain. Hence, while *Capital* remains the essential marxist text in this country, it is to *The Grundrisse* which Italian marxism has turned for its most important methodological insights. Negri has been central to this appropriation of *The Grundrisse*, which was the subject of his first

major work available in the English language, *Marx Beyond Marx* - which among other things, challenged Althusserian Marxism through a detailed study of *The Grundrisse*.

The influence of *The Grundrisse* on Western Marxism in general, and on Negri in particular, is discussed by Yann Moulier in a useful introduction to *The Politics of Subversion*. This, combined with a reading of John Merrington's notes to *The Revolution Retrieved*, and the essays by Harry Cleaver and Michael Ryan in *Marx Beyond Marx*, go some way to helping readers situate Negri and understand the broad outlines of his approach. A reading of Negri himself however, provides the best insight, particularly the later essays, ("Archaeology and Project" in *The Revolution Retrieved*, and part one of *The Politics of Subversion*) where he reflects on the development of workerism and autonomy and the relevance of the categories which they developed in relation to struggles within Italian society during the '60s and '70s, in the light of the early 1980s.

The essential concept, necessary for an understanding of Negri, is that of "class composition". This was developed by Italian Marxists in the 1960s as a means of avoiding the crude and misleading notion of class which reduces the possibility of revolution to a problem of "consciousness". As a practitioner of the methodology of class composition, Negri sees a distinction between, on the one hand, labour power and on the other, the working class seen as a "dynamic subject" and an "antagonistic force". Through an examination of labour power, the method is to discover the working class, "as a determinate level of needs and desires" which tends toward an assertion of an identity independent of its existence as labour power. As such, the theorist of class composition does not define the "working class" and proceed to observe it in order to pass judgement on its failures. Class composition observes labour power, discovers the working class and seeks to understand its dynamic.

The methodology of class composition led, in the 1960s, to the discovery of the "mass worker". The mass worker was characterised by "the refusal of work", which involved the rejection of all attempts to increase productivity, planning, and hierarchy, and

which spread from the factory to society at large (the mobility of labour being a crucial medium), to include the factory, the home, and the universities. Capital's response to the mass worker was a radical restructuring of social relations, and Negri's later work seeks to come to an understanding of that restructuring. Negri considers that the mass worker has been surpassed by a new class composition, that of the "social worker". The fragmentation of the mass worker was the aim of capitalist restructuring during the 1970s, which diffused the large scale factory into society at large, encouraging small plants, the use of new technologies, subcontracting and so on, in order to increase exploitation through decentralisation. This however, also created the conditions for the emergence of the "social worker", new social subjects whose struggles took place outside of the factory, and which included a range of groups regarded by orthodox marxism as "marginals".

The methodology of Negri's discussion of the movement from mass worker to social worker, is based upon that of Marx in *The Grundrisse*. Negri devotes much attention to Marx's analysis of the role of money as mediator of the division of labour and the significance of these categories to an understanding of class formation. It is to this end that he focusses upon the development of social labour, the nature of State forms, the relationship between the division of labour and organisation, and the overall movement of communism. These themes are expounded throughout both *The Revolution Retrieved*, and *The Politics of Subversion*, but three essays, read together, provide an overview of Negri's analysis: "Keynes and The Capitalist Theory of the State Post 1929", considers the relationship between the Keynesian State, the Bolshevik revolution, and the Mass Worker; "Crisis of the Planner State: Communism and Revolutionary Organisation", gives an analysis of the breakdown of Keynesianism in the context of new class composition, and provides an important insight into Negri's analysis of the nature of social antagonism and class formation; "The Crisis of the Crisis State", meanwhile, considers the post-Keynesian State - a State which, in order to impose its command over labour is intensely more coercive than hitherto, both nationally and globally - and presents Negri's analysis of the transition to communism in the context of real class antagonisms.

All three essays appear in *The Revolution Retrieved*, which also includes discussions of Marx, Keynes and Schumpeter on the nature of capitalist crises (Marx on Cycle and Crisis) and the relevance of The Grundrisse to contemporary capitalism, among other pieces. *The Politics of Subversion* closely relates to Negri's odyssey from mass worker to social worker and the possibilities of a new class composition beyond that. It considers the possibilities for communism presented, towards the mid-1980s, in the context of global crisis and uncertainty - and is in this sense a development of the new relationship of class forces outlined in 'The Crisis of the Crisis State'.

Negri's knowledge of Marx, the classical marxist tradition and contemporary "post-marxist" writing, is wide ranging and his work is both provocative and well informed as a consequence. This is not to say, however, that there is no room for criticisms of Negri and readers will doubtlessly find bones of contention. Two common objections, are that there is no concept of capitalist "decay" in his work, and that working class struggle appears as heroic or too subjective. Readers must make up their own minds after reading the works reviewed here. The point is that, in the present situation, when the fashion (given impetus by events in Eastern Europe) is to consign both Marx and communism to the dustbin of history, and when marxism has no relationship with the working class, Negri and the tradition from which he comes, are too important to be marginalised or excluded from serious debate.

Alun Francis



William Connolly: *Political Theory and Modernity* (Blackwell 1989)

Attacks on Marx have come in varying forms throughout the twentieth century, their quantity far outweighing their quality. This is particularly true of the 1970s and 1980s, which saw the development of post-structuralism into post-modernism and finally into post-marxism by many writers some of whom still consider themselves Marxist. There has in recent years however been a growing trend towards criticising Marx by categorising him with other 'classical' political theorists and rejecting the entire tradition of their thought from a particular perspective. The influence behind this perspective has often been Nietzsche. Connolly's work is a perfect example of such an approach.

In this work Connolly seeks to "privilege an Nietzschean perspective" in order to "call modernity into question without either lapsing into nostalgia for one of the worlds it has lost or postulating a future utopia where we could finally reach a 'home in the world'" (p.6). For it is precisely a 'home in the world' that both Nietzsche and Connolly believe political theory, including Marx, has sought. In his attempt to show how this is so Connolly rejects Marx along with traditional theory in favour of a post-modernist liberalism.

Connolly seeks to reject Marx and Hegel on the same grounds. To do this he focuses on Marx's essay *Critical Notes on the Article "The King of Prussia and Social Reform"*, in which Marx criticises the call for a political response to pauperism. Marx argues that a political response would not be the remedy, for England, which is the most politically developed country, is also the home of pauperism. Moreover, the political response to pauperism in England has always merely resulted in arguments between political parties. "The Whig regards the Tory and the Tory regards the Whig as the cause of pauperism" (quoted in Connolly p.126). Pauperism is thus seen as a defect of administration; its solution the remedying of this defect.

In this essay Marx offers an outline of a revolutionary critique of modern political administration and bourgeois politics. Instead of being involved in a party political argument about the relative defects of different policies Marx steps outside this debate in order to criticise 'politics in general' and therefore to suggest that the remedy lies in the revolutionary transformation of politics along with society.

Connolly however reads this essay in an entirely different way. Hegel sought to remedy the contradictions within society through specific administrative and political measures. A particular organisation of the state would be the solution. Marx does not seek the remedy in the state. "His answer is to eliminate civil society itself and to fold individuality into communal life" (p.127). For Connolly not only is this "idealism", it also suggests that the "debate between Hegel and Marx moves within the same sort of

circle Marx discerned in the debate between the Whigs and Tories. Each party, in opposing its adversary, first blames observed difficulties on practices or principles celebrated by the adversary and then responds by inflating a principle deflated by the opponent" (p.128). Actually, the debate between Hegel and Marx is nothing of the sort. Just as the Whigs and Tories were convinced that remedying administration could be the solution to pauperism, so Hegel was convinced that political organisations working within and through the state could overcome the contradictions of civil society. Neither the Whigs and Tories nor Hegel could see that the state was actually part of the problem. Marx could. In this sense Marx's dispute with Hegel is precisely the opposite of the dispute between Whigs and Tories for Marx criticises the very premises of Hegel's thought.

For Connolly's argument however, Marx and Hegel need to be enclosed within the same circle for he wishes to reject them both on the same grounds. Connolly believes that both Hegel and Marx offer 'depoliticised visions of life'. They both "depreciate the importance of politics in the realised society because each has too much faith in the possibility of transparency and harmony in the realised state" (p.130). Marx rejects Spirit but replaces it with a notion of the susceptibility of nature to human mastery: 'plasticity in nature'. Both Hegel and Marx insist that the world be for us, either through the realisation of Spirit or the mastery of nature. Marx's insistence that the world be formed by us instead of for us by Spirit is in fact Hegelianism by other means. "It is the conversion of Hegelianism into a set of presumptions more credible and amenable to modern sensibilities" (p.132).

Most readers will recognise this as a dubious argument. Connolly has to place Marx and Hegel within the same circle because he wants to reject them both as theories which involve suppression and containment of disruptive elements. 'Otherness', that which is different, will be interpreted as irrational, irresponsible or perverse and subjugated accordingly. Thus both theories contain an authoritarian impulse which is rooted in their ontological assumptions. It is in contrast to such theories that Connolly suggests a Nietzschean political position is more productive for it involves less constrictions on 'otherness'.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Zarathustra meets a hunchback and faces the problem of how to treat someone who is 'different'. Such 'difference' in a society based on Hegelian or Marxist principles would be "depreciated, regulated and helped in the name of a true norm". Zarathustra, epitomising Nietzschean ethics, treats the hunchback 'in a hunchbacked way'. Thus the phenomenon of otherness is recognised without being either subjugated or treated.

Connolly's reading of Nietzsche's treatment of 'otherness' represents for him the perfect example of the distinction between Nietzsche and traditional political theory. Nietzsche recognises the phenomenon of otherness as

an essential part of the ambiguity of modernity; traditional political theory, following Western culture in general, seeks ways of restraining and containing ambiguity. Traditional political theory has been driven by the desire to found a society in which we can be at one with ourselves and the world. Nietzsche considers this to be the politics of homesickness.

Nietzsche gives a list of German philosophers, Leibnitz, Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer, to which Connolly adds Marx, who represent "the most fundamental form of romanticism and homesickness there has ever been...One is no longer at home anywhere; at last one longs back for that place in which alone one can be at home: the Greek world" (quoted in Connolly p.135). In political theory homesickness is the demand that one attempts to realise what one yearns for most in life but which modernity necessarily denies us. Thus Marxist political theory is a combination of modern man's ambiguous and uncertain position in the world and Marx's ontological assumptions regarding nature and man's domination of it.

Connolly therefore uses Nietzsche in order to reject traditional political theory. His effort to place Marx firmly within this tradition, despite Marx's clear distance from it, is an attempt to completely clear the grounds for his own post-modernist politics which he feels is more pertinent to the late twentieth century. This politics has its origins in Nietzsche. Nietzsche's acceptance of the ambiguities and uncertainties of modernity, characterised in his treatment of 'otherness', is expected to convince us of the essential differences within human beings (as if we needed convincing) and to therefore seek ways of enabling those differences to be. For Nietzsche this involves "giving style to one's character", which Connolly sees in the late twentieth century as involving adjustments in diet, exercise, reading, habits and relationships (p.163). This, Connolly believes, is the basis for a "reconstituted, radicalised liberalism" (p.174). It would be a liberal radicalism in its sensitivity to the rights of difference against the weight of mastery and normality, and it would be a radical liberalism because of its dissent from the settled frame in which contemporary issues are debated.

With conclusions such as these one recognises precisely the objective behind Connolly's work. We have arrived at yet another form of reformism. Revolutionary transformation is out of court because it implies domination and mastery. Instead each individual is to develop and alter various characteristics of his/her own style in a society which gives free reign to these individual nuances. This would involve rethinking our notions of law, gender, race etc.

The originality of Connolly lies in the route he has taken to arrive at his post-modernist reformism. He rejects the tradition of political theory, Marx included, by explicitly privileging a Nietzschean perspective. Nietzsche, who remained a shadowy figure behind much of post-modernist thought, has

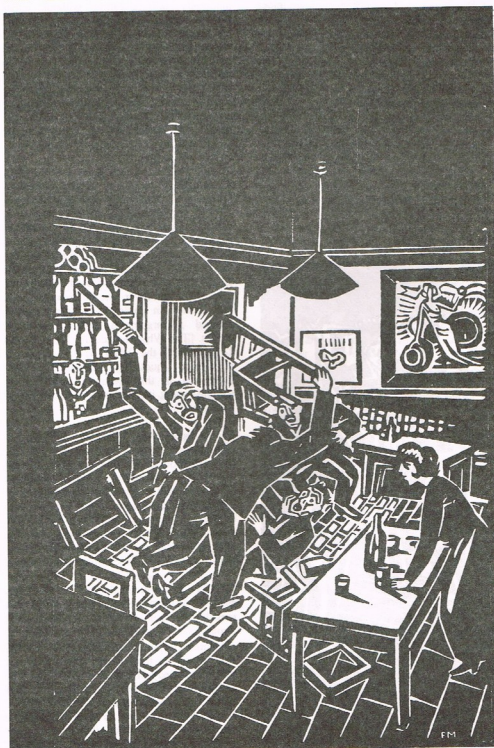
finally been dragged out of the shadows to constitute the basis of yet another form of liberalism.

It is pertinent to point out, however, that Connolly completely ignores the other aspect of Nietzsche's work, such as his concept of the aristocracy as a historical force and the implications of this, and his disparaging remarks about the working class, women and Jews. Also, it would perhaps be wise for Connolly to examine an alternative current way of reading Nietzsche. For this I would refer him to the summer and fall 1980 issues of *National Socialist*, an American neo-Nazi journal, where a Nietzschean perspective is privileged not for a radical liberalism but as the philosophical basis for racism and Nazism. Whilst they state that Nietzsche was not a National Socialist, they do believe that "only those who are born National Socialists...will be able to recognise the vital truths which were revealed for the first time

by Friedrich Nietzsche". And they suggest that liberal intellectuals only select "those parts...that seem to be in line with their personal wishes and prejudices". It would therefore seem wise for Connolly to address these issues, as they are conspicuous by their absence from his book.

But for our purposes Connolly's book is useful as yet another variation on the rejection of Marxism through the 'guilt by association theme'. To reject Marxism most writers have had to either place it within the same circle as Hegel or hold it responsible for stalinism, thereby leaving them free to conclude that Marxism can offer us nothing in the late twentieth century and that we need new forms of political thinking. Even with a different route the destination remains the same: bourgeois thought for bourgeois society.

Mark Neocleous



Louis Althusser

Louis Althusser was one of the most important stalinist theologians of the post-war period. Bringing a set of meticulously vague and scrupulously corrupt categories - "overdetermination", "ideological interpellation", etc - to bear upon the problem of stalinist ideological legitimisation, his impact was immense. The world wide dissemination of his thought obstructed critical thought and discussion on the left for almost two decades.

Stated in political terms, Althusser's aim was to destroy the intellectual resources necessary for the critique of stalinism. His great achievement was to consign to an intellectual gulag the minds of many aspiring revolutionaries. His writings were of such labyrinthine complexity and gratuitous obscurity that merely to enter into dialogue with them was to risk losing one's bearings entirely. Many of those who did so have never re-emerged.

Updating the discredited "histmat" and "diamat" of his political masters through copious injections of vulgarised structuralist misanthropy - his "scientific anti-humanism" -

Althusser provided a justification of stalinism in the guise of a theoretical critique.

It is clear now that Althusser's writings have contributed to the ideological collapse of stalinism, by demonstrating ultimately what he had endeavoured to hide: the absolute opposition of stalinism to the project of human emancipation, many of his followers were left no option but to embrace the postmodernist celebration of fragmentation as the increasingly dominant ideological form of the prevention of communism. Althusser's thought, marked above all by a wilful dishonesty - note, for example, his claim that "in 1965 ... I was already writing about Stalin" - is thus of interest to all who seek to understand the destruction of reason by the categories of bureaucratic administration and terror.

A taste of the full horror of Althusser's project can be gained from his claim that "ideology (as a system of mass representation) is indispensable in any society if men are to be formed, transformed and equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of

existence. If, as Marx said, history is a perpetual transformation of men's conditions of existence, and if this is equally true of socialist society, then men must be consciously transformed so as to adapt them to these conditions; if this 'adaption' cannot be left to spontaneity but must be constantly assumed, dominated and controlled, it is in ideology that this demand is expressed, that this distance is measured, that this contradiction is lived and its resolution is 'activated'. It is in ideology that the classless society lives the inadequacy/adequacy of the relation between it and the world, it is in it and by it that it transforms men's 'consciousness', that is, their attitudes and behaviour so as to raise them to the level of their tasks and the conditions of their existence." (For Marx, p235). What is this but a legitimisation of the gulag?

Louis Althusser, the last high priest of stalinism, died on October 22nd 1990, aged 72.

David Gorman

CONFERENCE REVIEWS

A Response to the Critique conference 'The Disintegration of Stalinism and the Revival of Socialism', LSE 23-4 February 1990

This conference proclaimed the end of the long epoch when all socialist tendencies orientated themselves by competing definitions of the attractive and repulsive force field of the Soviet Union. The platform speakers hailed the end of that trotskyst tradition of producing ever more epicyclic explanations of the USSR: "degenerate workers' state", "partially regenerated workers' state", "state capitalist" What was remarkable about this proclamation was that its social form could have occurred at any time during the epoch of stalinist/trotskyst apotheosis and that its form could have carried these apotheotics without strain.

Plenary sessions occurred in a lecture theatre with rows of seats rising up from a platform. Platform speakers gave presentations to the audience. After a few such speeches there were questions and statements from the audience. After several of these a speaker would reply in a single declamation which parcelled up several contributions. These

performances were impressive - impressive as performances, as theatre, as sport.

The political culture reproduced in these "exchanges" had more in common with the multi-game demonstrations of a chess master than with nurturing a culture of subversion. There was some use of the word "dialectics" in these discussions; there was little dialecticity in these exchanges which partnered the etiquette of the academic conference with that of the student union debate.

The architecture of the hall was a perfect embodiment of the social relations in the conference. It will be said, of course, that such a venue was the best available, that the tiered arrangement of the seating in no way expressed any intentionality on the organisers' part. In a sense such a response is valid: the decision to use such a structure would have simply appeared as natural and obvious from the common-sense of the intellectual worker in the academy. This choice would not have appeared to be a choice. The actual choice was not operative at the individual level but at the collective level of left-academic culture. Nonetheless, it was a choice.

There was no sense whatever in the plenaries that the hall's architecture had any relationship with the political-cultural work being produced in it. Far less was there any sense that there was a tension between the theoretical content of that culture and the social forms that articulated that content.

Between this theoretical content and the institutional origin of the modern lecture theatre there played a mix of resonance and dissonance. The lecture theatre derives from the Renaissance medical schools, it carries on the pattern of tiers of spectator seats rising from a table on which the dissection of a corpse was demonstrated. The operating theatre was itself modelled on the dramatic theatre. The three theatres share the structure of performers and spectators (see Michel Foucault, *Cadaveric Discourses and the Discourse of the Cadaver*, Tulane University Press Occasional Papers no 81).

Whose corpse lies on the table?

David Murray.



In August 1990 men and women gathered to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the murder of Leon Trotsky. They must have met in many towns and there were at least four conferences, in Wuppertal, Harrogate, Aberdeen and Mexico City, to discuss the life and works of Leon Trotsky. Some came to praise, others came to damn with faint praise, and others again would have liked to bury the name with the man.

The conferences were not large - and that was partly because the convenors had decided that a restricted group would allow for more fruitful discussion. But they were also small because the number of persons who might have something to contribute to an evaluation of the work of Trotsky was limited. Indeed, at the one gathering which I attended there was far too little original thought and an insufficiency of ideas on the career of a man who at one stage stood almost alone in analysing and condemning fascism on the one hand and Stalinism on the other.

The Stalin era had a profound effect on all of us, preventing the development of Marxist ideas. It had an effect on the cadre attracted to the socialist movement - some of them miseducated in the Stalinist parties and bringing with them the corrupted influence of that movement. GPU terror had reached deep into the ranks of the socialist movement. This had weakened or even destroyed a cadre inside and outside the USSR. No one was spared. Trotsky, too, had been deeply affected during his life by the agents of the GPU, through the death of his children and his closest political associates. When we come to assess his work in those last days in exile we will have to take into consideration the effects of the all-pervading terror unleashed by Stalin.

Now, with the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in eastern Europe, there must be new hope that some of that terror has been removed. And a renewed hope that new ideas will be allowed to blossom. This seems to have been foreshadowed at these conferences. For the first time in almost seven decades there were academics (if not political activists) from the USSR and eastern Europe and from the west and, I have heard from China as well. Indeed, it was the purpose of many of the convenors to invite scholars from behind the "iron" and "bamboo" curtains so that there could be a widening of the discourse on Marxist theory.

There were representatives from the USSR and eastern Europe at Aberdeen and it was this that aroused my interest. Without deprecating anything said by the British or north American speakers, I knew much of what they had to say. Their writings, some

fascinating, others fairly mundane, had been available in print over many decades. But there had been a deadening silence from eastern Europe on the question of Trotsky for so long that this seemed to offer the hope that something really new might be forthcoming. Yet, it is too soon to expect a great revival. The academics from eastern Europe brought some new factual material, and some analytical insights, but much of what they produced was little more than run-of-the-mill papers, little different from the usual contributions to annual conferences of "learned" or not so learned societies. Some delegates were probably invited because they had delivered papers, or had published some work on Trotsky. Their contributions varied from the good to the awful. Some had read widely and this included manuscripts found in the archives, others seemed to have only a patchy knowledge of the subject. This is the pattern at all conferences and needs little comment - except for the fact that these men and women had all expenses paid, and some did little to justify the cost.

There was also a hidden agenda in some of the papers and this was obvious in what some said aloud. In other cases the objective could be guessed. It was generally taken as read that Stalin was beyond the pale and did not need discussion - consequently the focus could rest on Trotsky with no need to apologise for discussing his theories and activities. In so doing the delegates were by no means committed to adopting a "Trotskyist orientation". Some used Trotsky to denounce bureaucracy (this was said explicitly by a Czech who maintained that bureaucracy was the only aspect of Trotsky that interested him); or praised Trotsky to justify claims that culture had declined in Soviet society because pop-singers had been allowed to perform. There were quite obviously differences between those who supported Ligachev (or his faction) and the followers of Gorbachev; others came to plead for a "free market" economy. But the influences were not always obvious. One Soviet professor gave a paper in which he argued that there was no difference between Lenin and Trotsky. In fact they marched together in all issues. This is quite obviously not the case and I could not understand his reasoning... Later, I was told the intention was to condemn Lenin and Trotsky equally.

Yet, there were some speakers who had obviously read Trotsky quite differently. The speaker from east Germany (who had studied in the USSR) provided an account of Trotsky's writings in German during the years 1904-7 in Kautsky's paper, *Neue Zeit*. He contrasted the views of the Mensheviks and Lenin on the nature of Revolution, drawn in their case from an analysis of the French Revolution (1789-1794), and then proceeded

to show that Trotsky had taken a different view because he drew his lessons from the events of 1848. The differences between Lenin and the Mensheviks were over the nature of the bourgeois revolution: while Trotsky's perspective related to the coming socialist revolution.

Another paper, discussing Trotsky's attitude to the second world war was perceptive. This speaker, criticising Trotsky's prediction that the war would end with the sweeping away of Stalinism said this was falsified by Trotsky's failure to realise that Stalinism did not exist in the superstructure of society, but was deeply entrenched in the Soviet economy. Consequently, Trotsky's agenda for the revitalisation of Soviet society through a political revolution - did not eventuate. Unfortunately this point was not elaborated. The audience was left to their own conclusions: namely that this was a plea for the market - or alternatively (following the journal, *Critique*) that the Soviet economy was based on massive waste and had to be completely transformed before socialism could be built.

There is as yet only limited access to the Trotsky papers but there were snippets confirming some of Trotsky's claims in his writings published in the west. But there were also some writings on the pre-revolutionary period that were not available to us. I asked whether there were any documents of the *Mezhrayonka*, the Petrograd Inter-borough Committee to which Trotsky adhered before he joined the Bolsheviks in 1917, and was told that there were one or two papers written on the organisation. These it was promised, would be sent from the USSR when the delegates returned.

If this was a detailed report of the one conference I attended it would have to include comments on Greg Benton's paper on the Chinese Trotskyists (far and away the most important of the groups formed on the 1930s), Richard Day's discussion of the Hegel roots of Trotsky's thoughts, of Hillel Tickin's paper on Trotsky's theory of the long wave of capitalist development and so on. But summaries can do no justice to detailed studies: readers will have to wait for their publication. But the potential that was demonstrated by these commemorative meetings lay far beyond the papers that were presented. What was really significant was the possibility of opening up discussions on Marxism across geographical boundaries and of clearing out the crudities of the Stalin era. As yet it is only a possibility and it might be premature to celebrate such co-operation. It is the prospect that is so exciting and challenging. Much hard work will be needed to transform it into reality.

Baruch Hirson



12th Radical Philosophy Conference, London, 17th November 1990

The subject of the conference - "Values, Resistance and Social Change" - seemed to offer a range of themes and issues crucial in the aftermath of the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe. The reality was, however, different.

The proceedings were marked by an atmosphere of disorientation in which contributions tended to be vague and unfocused, often failing to engage with the subjects they purported to address. Central questions - the historical significance of stalinism, the future of socialism, the nature of postmodernism, the radical right's proclamation of the "end of history" - were trivialised and rendered banal. Occasionally, a potentially interesting idea was floated and ... floated away. The result was an opportunity lost.

Philosophy made only a guarded appearance. Key categories - class, alienation, dialectics and exploitation, for example - simply failed to attend. The nature of many contributions suggested an often ??? capitulation to the postmodernist assault on human social reality.

Jarring with this self-referenced discourse of professional abstractions was Istvan Mészáros reference to surplus extraction in the USSR and the involvement of human beings in the momentous events in eastern Europe and their aftermath.

These events themselves constitute the real problem. The collapse of stalinism in eastern Europe has thrown much of the left into confusion. Despite the maintenance of a critical orientation towards stalinism, failure to develop a theoretical critique in terms of political economy has led to bewilderment in the face of change. Lacking a full comprehension of what had been rejected, anti-stalinism effectively legitimised acquiescence to stalinism as a transitional form by accepting its deeper presupposition as a permanent necessity. This expressed itself at the conference through an ambivalent attitude towards local authority socialism, a fear that rejection of the welfare state bureaucracy means a return to "primitive communism" and a belief that the non-capitalist future requires the market plus state limitations.

The root of this confusion is a view of the proletariat as a passive, directionless object. In accord with this misconception was one participant's call - endorsed by others - for a "culture of active citizenship" under which individuals would be "expected" to participate in "community work". This was presented as a necessary condition for the development of "socialist consciousness". Bureaucracy, in one form or another, is thus still conceived of either as a transitional form or an end in itself. For a left still implicated in these forms, the removal of bureaucracy can be experienced only as a loss.

Socialism has no future from the standpoint of working class needs, nor has it had any since, in 1914, it entered into terminal contradiction with that most recalcitrant of social realities: combined labour. The task is not to socialise the market, but to participate in the self-emanipatory movement of the proletariat towards the society of freely associating producers. In the context of the need for communism, the concern with "ethics", "morality" and "values" constitutes an evasion of social reality. A future of bureaucratic administration tempered with moral concern is no future. It is more of the same.

David Gorman & Bob Shepherd.

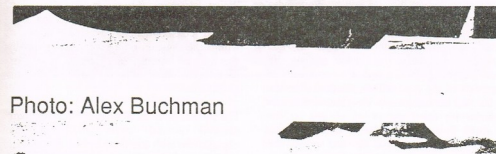
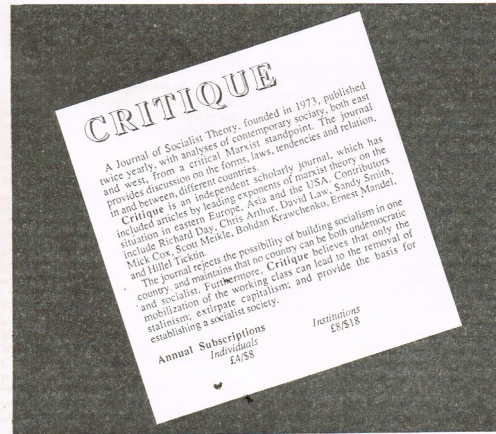


Photo: Alex Buchman



a general crisis exemplified by rampant inflation. Wages fell, the working day lengthened, unemployment rose. Hitler's disbandment of the Trade Unions in 1933 - his first piece of major social legislation - was yet another expression of a process decisively set in motion a decade earlier. It was both through these unfolding conditions and as a consequence of them that Benjamin, like so many of his generation, became progressively radicalised and receptive to revolutionary praxis. His own intellectual development during this period continued to be influenced by his friendship with Bloch and Scholem and his increasing interest in marxism focussed on Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness*, and the consequent debates following its publication. A further and perhaps decisive influence was a developing relationship with the young Bolshevik theatre producer, Asja Lacin, an assistant to Brecht and Piscator, which rapidly progressed from assignation to a tempestuous love affair.

During the rest of the 1930s, and until Hitler's rise to power, he managed to secure enough funds through employment and parental generosity to allow him to make extended trips to Paris, the Mediterranean, and afford a lengthy stay in Moscow in the winter of 1926-7.

His trip to the U.S.S.R. had a twofold purpose. To visit the hospitalised Asja Lacin and to reach a decisive conclusion as to whether to join the German Communist Party (K.P.D.), a matter which he had frequently considered. A range of factors were taken into account in this deliberation: Pragmatically the K.P.D. could offer him paid employment - an attractive proposition as his academic career had all but stalled. Secondly, and rather naively, he saw the party as an environment in which he could fruitfully intervene, since it was "organised and guaranteed contact with the people". He never joined, concluding that his main area of competence was "overspecialised". Instead he gravitated towards influential circles orbiting around Adorno, Horkheimer, and most fruitfully for Benjamin, Brecht. At this point, he construed his own project as working in "an illegal incognito among the bourgeois authors", pursuing a destructive project from within.

Driven into exile for the second time in his life, along with so many of the same milieu, his primary source of support from 1934 onwards was a small but regular stipend, paid by the relocated Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. In return for this support he supplied one major essay every year and an irregular series of reviews. This at least provided for his basic needs, supplementing this income by writing for a variety of emigre journals.

These mature years of his life were his most productive. However he never saw the publication of a full length book under his own name. What has been bequeathed in the form of a collection of aphorisms - *One Way Street*, (1928), reviews of contemporary

literary production, monographic presentations of particular movements or individuals, or his better known theoretical work in essay form - for example, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935) - nonetheless represents a prolific intellectual activity. Yet despite this productivity, Benjamin never completed the most enduring of his work, the suggestive *Arcades* project which he was to work on from the late 1920s until his death. Intended to represent a panoramic disclosure of 19th century Paris, the project encompassed architecture, literature, and the character of the life of the city.

A refugee in Paris since 1935, living a financially precarious and isolated existence, he was incarcerated in an internment camp in the autumn of 1939. Through the efforts of influential friends he was soon released and eventually secured a U.S. entry permit.

However, the last few months of his life were desperately tortuous. In his final letter to Adorno, Benjamin vividly expressed the sense of being encircled and overcome by the forces of destructive reaction who could clearly identify him as both a Jew and a communist: "The total uncertainty as to what the next days, the next hours will bring has dominated my existence for many weeks. I am condemned to read every newspaper (they appear here on only one page) as a writ published against me and to hear every radio report the voice of bad tidings." His apartment, containing the expansive library - the tools of his labour - which he had painstakingly assembled was eventually confiscated by the Gestapo. He was unsure of the fate of the manuscripts abandoned to the care of Parisian friends. Besides, he was not drawn by the prospect of settling in the United States, where he assumed he was destined to be carted up and down the country, exhibited as the "last European".

His reputation as a polymathic critic of intellectual and cultural production is entirely posthumous. During his own life he was known only in small, albeit influential circles of friends and associates in France and Germany. Benjamin's wider reception can be dated from 1955 when Adorno undertook the task of editing a selection of his essays. It was not until the 1970s that his major writings appeared in English under the title *Illuminations* (1973).

The disparate reception of this work after his death is indicative of a genuinely original thinker whose legacy requires thoughtful appropriation. He has largely remained a hostage to those of his contemporaries who reduce the scope of his thought to one of its many determinants, alternatively to those archaeologists of the aesthetic who call him to their service in wilfully arcane academic dispute. For example, both Susan Sontag and Hannah Arendt lay claim to aspects of his writings whilst simultaneously detaching him from the Marxist tradition.

In post-war Europe Benjamin's influence became widely assimilated in theoretical and academic dispute and, less conspicuously, in a wider arena. John Berger's influential

television series *Ways of Seeing* originally broadcast in the early 1970s was directly influenced by Benjamin. While the particular content of his work remains vigorously contested his insightfulness is beyond doubt, the originality of which is attested to by the difficulty with which it has been appropriated in the anglo-saxon world.

To approach Benjamin's legacy is to approach a body of work that does not lend itself to casual reading. His sentences are concentrated, his writing style is simultaneously opaque and concise. There is the non-appearance of immediate consistency where motifs, which ordinarily run at cross purposes are brought together but never unified. His thought is perhaps best apprehended as allegorical, he was the master of the extended metaphor, which sought to find both past and future location in order to illuminate the present moment. The anglo-saxon habit of reading in a literal manner fails to make any effective connection with the metaphorical intent of his paradoxically couched word formations.

Within his work there is an attempt to seek and disclose the contiguous relationships of a range of exploratory strands of 19th and 20th century intellectual and artistic production. This process focussed on movements such as Surrealism or Dada, or individual producers, for example, Baudelaire, Fourier, Bergson, or Proust. Receptive to so much and so many he remained outside established orthodoxy and beyond consignment to a single location within the division of intellectual labour. He was never simply a literary critic or sociologist of art, a philosopher or aesthetician.

The pivotal point in Benjamin's development occurred around about 1925 in his engagement with the marxism of the period. It followed from the completion of his book manuscript on German Tragic drama, which itself was concerned with the political nature of cultural practice, a manuscript which he later recognised as being dialectical but not materialist in orientation.

Aware of these failings, his attention became focussed on the multiplicity of ways in which that practice was conditioned and mediated by changing forms of technology and social organisation.

The key category that he developed in this context, was *Technik*, a word which in German means both "technology" and "technique", an ambiguity which he retained in order to emphasise the realm of practical material intervention as the integration of theory and practice. For Benjamin, *Technik* expressed the unity of theory and practice, of human relations of production and the means of production, of technique and technology. This implied a decisive rejection of the positivist separation of these realms, or the supersession of one by the other as in Hegel's triumph of the spirit.

Benjamin located intellectual activity within the context of *Technik* echoing Marx's rejection of assigning it the capacity for an independent and distinct development of its



own. He railed against the account given by the bourgeois intelligentsia of its own activity as an attempt to expose and assert a constellation of qualities which were timeless in nature, rather than recognising a continuous process of change and movement which demanded purposive understanding rather than introverted contemplation.

The bourgeoisie was not the only object of attack. He took issue with those on the left who asserted that adherence to the 'correct' political line absolved the work of art from having to measure up to any 'bourgeois' standards of quality. Benjamin saw political tendency and quality unified in what he called 'literary tendency'. In his view, "This literary tendency, which is implicitly or explicitly included in every correct political tendency, this and nothing else constitutes the quality of a work. The correct political tendency of a work includes its literary quality because it includes its literary tendency." (his emphasis). The unification of political tendency and literary quality is ensured by the use of progressive literary tendencies.

For Benjamin, these tendencies included the attempt to break from private speculation and in Brecht's words, "break into other people's heads", awakening "deliberation and action". Consequently the ability of this form of production to effect change could be judged on its ability to organise and reorganise political groupings, formation and party. He was careful to stress that the organisational usefulness of writing ought not to be

confined to propagandist use. Commitment alone was not enough since "the best opinion is of no use if it does not make something useful of those who hold it". In order to subvert this possibility, progressive writing had to be simultaneously a model to instruct others in production, and secondly, to place an improved apparatus in their hands: An apparatus that would be the better 'the more consumers it brings into contact with the production process - in short the more readers and spectators it turns into collaborators'.

An exemplification of the use of a progressive literary technique was where the effect was to intervene in and aid the forging of class organisation out of a responsive and collaborative proletariat. Antithetical to this was a conception of addressing the public as a passive consumer of products originating from an individual creator. The public was a corrupt and alienated condition of the mass as much as was the conception of an individual creative personality. To proceed otherwise was to reproduce the opposition of theory to practice, producer to consumer and the active to the passive - in short the very antinomies of bourgeois society.

It was Benjamin's contention that the writer must be transformed from being a "supplier of the production apparatus, into an engineer who seeks his task in adapting that apparatus to the ends of the proletarian revolution". This conception was predicated upon the "functioning transformation" of various aspects of mass culture, specifically those

developed through techniques of mechanical reproduction which already served to dissipate the aura surrounding the previously unique and distanced work of art embedded in tradition and ritual. This auratic quality induced concentration, empathy, absorption and identification on the part of the reader or audience. These conditions of aesthetic and political passivity were seen to be undermined by the development of photography, film, radio and mass circulation newspapers which served to destroy the unique and harmonious work of art. The progressive consequence of this was the emergence of an estrangement on the part of the audience, which created the possibility for a critical attitude towards that being experienced. This apprehension consciously intersected with Brecht's theatrical technique of alienating the audience from what was being performed on the stage. This strategy sought to transform the passive consumer into the active creator through the use of episodic play structure, direct addresses to the audience and open-endedness of conclusion.

It was never satisfactorily ascertained where the body of the refugee was laid to rest. Hannah Arendt, who had known Benjamin during his stay in Paris, arrived in Port Bou a few months after his death but sought his grave in vain. As the years passed by others came in search, this time to be greeted by cemetery attendants who directed the curious towards a wooden enclosure upon which his name had been scrawled. This apocryphal location owed its existence to the shrewd perception of the attendants who recognised that the satisfied visitor was more likely to be generous when dispensing a tip.

Even in death it is strikingly apposite that Benjamin remains enigmatic, subject to the curious enquirer in search of what is then willed into existence, ably assisted by an overseer of the relic who is in a position to exploit apparent ambiguity for a self-interested purpose.

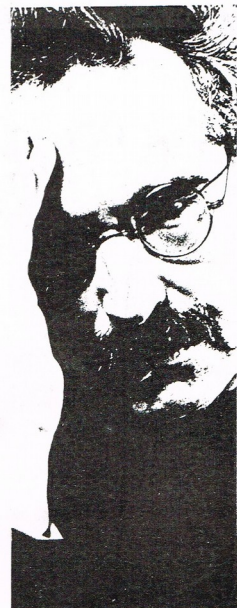
For too long the written trace of Benjamin has been subject to an analogous fate. His image splintered by arcane factional dispute, elevated as a creative if obscure individual genius and consigned to one or other area of an increasingly detailed location in the division of intellectual labour.

Benjamin advanced beyond the confines of the dominant debates on artistic, literary and intellectual production in the 1930s. He was one of only a handful of theoreticians who not only rejected the sterility of stalinist diamat, but who also tried to both broaden and deepen marxist theory. To undertake this in isolation and exile, in the face of fascism's advance was to undertake a herculean task.

Walter Benjamin inaugurated a project that demands recovery; a recovery that is perhaps only now possible. As stalinism enters a period of terminal decline so the possibilities to successfully appropriate what was denounced as heretical unfold

David Officer

Walter Benjamin



On the Suicide of the Refugee W.B.

I'm told you raised your hand against yourself
Anticipating the butcher
After eight years in exile, observing the rise
of the enemy
Then at last, brought up against an
impassable barrier
You passed, they say, a passable one.

Empires collapse. Gang leaders
Are strutting about like statesmen. The
People
Can no longer be seen under all these
armaments

So the future lies in darkness and the forces
of right
Are weak. All this was plain to you
When you destroyed a torturable body.

Bertolt Brecht,

subsequently observed that this movement comprised, in large part, the radical bourgeoisie, which was both incapable of either superseding its subjectivist or individualist orientation. While actively interested in Jewish theology and counting Gershom Scholem - a leading scholar of Jewish mysticism and authority on the Kabbalah - as one of his earliest and closest friends, he was never drawn towards Zionism. Nevertheless judaic conceptions of a future transfigurative moment remained important for Benjamin's development, selectively appropriated on his own terms and for his own purpose.

He remained an active member of the Youth Movement only until the declaration of war. The enthusiastic endorsement of the national call to arms by its leading members only served to crystallise his prognosis that it was an essentially reactionary force. Benjamin avoided military conscription by feigning sciatica, and soon departed Germany. Exiled and isolated in a Europe traumatised by total war, he developed a romantic anti-capitalism, a trajectory encouraged through his association with Ernst Bloch. He apprehended the modern world as soulless, dispirited and prosaic, a condition that demanded apocalyptic transcendence. In this context it is understandable that Benjamin, like both Lukacs and Bloch, turned towards the realm of art in pursuit of this theme. It was here that the most developed and unambiguous utopian impulse to transcendence was thought to be expressed in the authentic work of art. By 1919 he had completed a doctoral thesis at Berne University, Switzerland on *The Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism*, a distillation of themes developed in the war years.

By then, Benjamin had been married for two years, and despite his attempts to find work, was forced in 1923 to return with his young wife and son to his parental home. Although he failed to secure himself a university post, he had begun to establish his reputation as a "man of letters". By 1925 he had translated and seen published a selection from the work of the 19th century poet, Baudelaire and completed a major study of the German poet, Goethe.

The immediate post world-war period may have been personally disordered for Benjamin, but they were inordinately tumultuous years for German society. In Russia the question of power had been forcefully posed by significant sections of the working class, but in Germany, the bourgeoisie was able to meet that challenge with an effective and ruthless opposition that swept the workers' movement from the streets. By 1923, Germany was experiencing

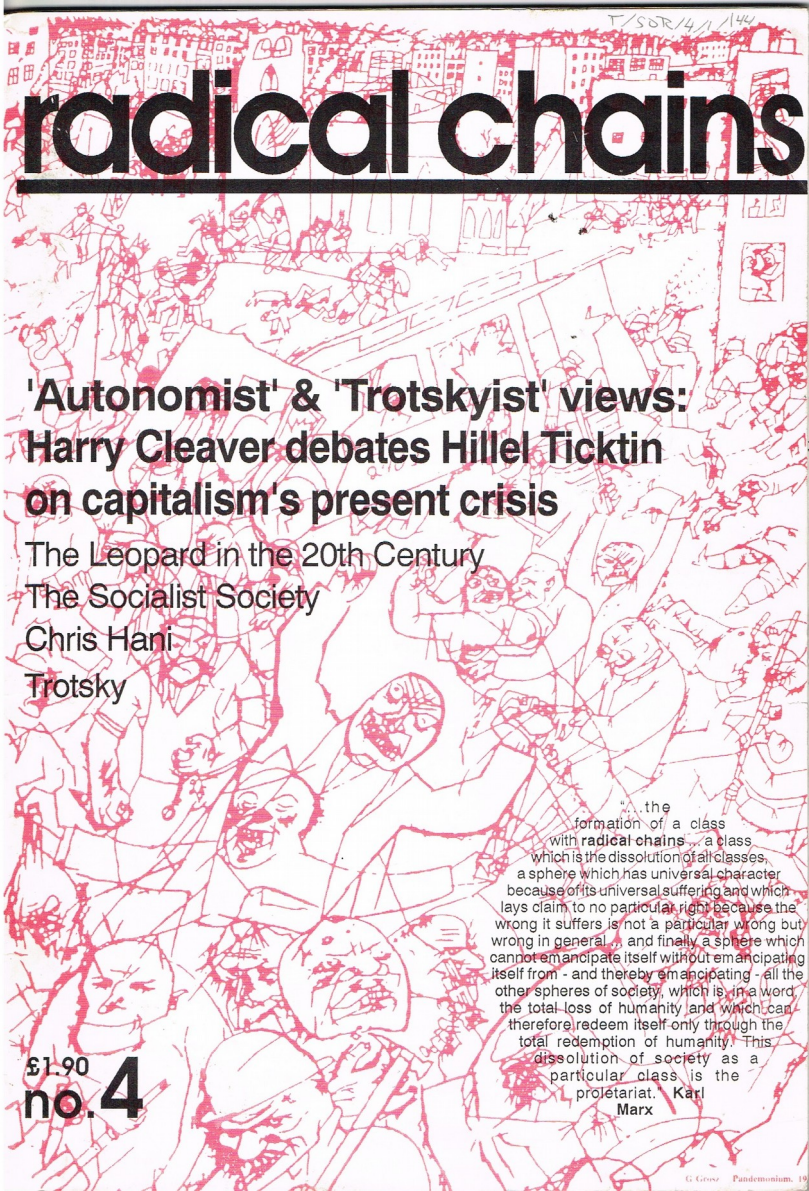
It has been frequently noted that 1990 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of continental Europe to Fascism. In the midst of this remembrance the mass displacement of the civilian population and the flight of the refugee has served as little more than a footnote to the formal drama of diplomatic intrigue and military manoeuvre. Yet it did not require the declaration of national war to create a German diaspora comprised of jews, communists, liberals and others. Many oppositionists had already departed their native country during the 1930s, seeking, among other places, shelter on French soil. By June 1940, the relative security afforded by this location was violently disturbed by the armistice signed between the Third Reich and the Vichy Government. Thousands hurriedly decamped once again and trekked along an established escape route to North America, via the Iberian Peninsula.

On the 25th September 1940, a small group of refugees approached the Spanish town of Port Bou by an unguarded route, across mountainous terrain. Their journey was thwarted by Spanish guards who had closed the border earlier that day and who intended to return them to France the next morning. That night, one among the refugees, Walter Benjamin, took his own life. The following day, disturbed by what had happened during the night, the guards relented and his companions proceeded to Portugal.

On hearing of his death, Bertolt Brecht, himself having just reached the safety of the United States, was reported to have said of Benjamin that German literature had suffered its first real loss to Hitler.

Benjamin was born in Berlin in 1892, the son of affluent Jewish parents. The family lived in a substantial house in Grunewald, the patrician quarter of the German capital. By his own account he grew up in a materially comfortable and secure environment, surrounded by the objects of his father's trade in antiques and valuable oriental carpets. Here he absorbed the extravagant habits of the compulsive bibliophile and collector of objects of beauty.

Prior to the outbreak of the Great War, he developed precocious talents as a writer within the broad and diverse German Youth Movement. This mass organisation drew its support from all sections of German society and acted as a conduit for the expression of protest against the decaying values of the previous generation. This tended to take an atavistic form evoking nature and tradition rooted in Teutonic myth, purity and heritage. Benjamin never subscribed to this dominant perspective but gravitated towards a milieu guided by the rationalistic humanism of the educational reformer Gustav Wyneken. He



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radical chains

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...the formation of a class with radical chains... a class, which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere which has universal character because of its universal suffering and which lays claim to no particular right because the wrong it suffers is not a particular wrong but wrong in general... and finally a sphere which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from - and thereby emancipating - all the other spheres of society, which is, in a word, the total loss of humanity (and which can therefore redeem itself only through the total redemption of humanity). This dissolution of society as a particular class is the proletariat. Karl Marx

Statement of intent

The working class is bound by radical chains: it experiences suffering and dehumanisation of global significance, yet because of this it develops capacities and needs which call for the supersession of class society. This 'greatest of all the productive forces' demands conditions adequate to itself, and is self-driven to bring them into being, ie to abolish itself as the working class. Communism is thus not merely an idea. It is a human need, embodied in the historical presence of combined propertyless labour power.

Communism is freely associating people creating themselves through conscious social planning. Communism is the living potential against which the alienated categories and experiences of the present make human sense.

Marx's method was developed in the period of ascendant capitalism. It remains the foundation of revolutionary thought and action today. The world in which we live is riven by a contradiction between the need for and possibility of planning and the law of value. Within the transitional epoch as a whole these correspond to the needs of the proletariat and those of capital, which remain the polarities of class relationships across the earth.

Planning has not superseded the law of value, and is not doing so. There cannot be planning except by the producers. Administration, by bureaucracies and elites, functions in a variety of forms as a surrogate for the law of value. Centralised, top-down attempts to coordinate the activities of the direct producers and adjacent social strata must fail, for they are properly subject neither to the discipline of the market nor to that of the consciously associating society. In the presence of combined labour, containment and external coordination of an administrative nature can only be partial, unstable, and unsuccessful.

The communist potential of the working class remains unrealised: the containment of October was primarily achieved before October, internationally, through bourgeois administrative responses to the proletariat in Britain, Germany, and elsewhere. The USSR was transformed into a centre of reaction penetrating the world labour movement.

For more than half a century stalinism partnered social democracy in obstructing proletarian self-transformation on a world scale. In fact, the bogus claims made for Soviet 'planning' gave social democracy a new lease of life by appearing to vindicate the rationality and viability of centralised administration. By virtue of its origins in the destruction of October, stalinism was able to bring marxism into disrepute. It corrupted marxism which became something else whilst seeking communist credentials, and being granted them by the political representatives of capital.

The problem today is even more serious

ous than that of the years following 1848 when the revolutionary party, as Marx observed, was 'driven from the field' by the industrial and commercial recovery. It is not only that we are surrounded by the debris of October. The working corollary of this is that in different national locations the working class has been obstructed by often symbiotic mass stalinist and social democratic 'workers parties' and social structures functioning as barriers to proletarian self-development. Even worse, there continue to exist small but politically significant groupings which have internalised - with whatever reservations - key aspects of the stalinist ideological legacy. The crippling assertion that the USSR and similar entities were transitional societies is only the most obvious of these. Stalinism is too often narrowly and misleadingly seen as a primarily political degeneration.

The core of historical materialism is the analysis of social forms of surplus extraction and labour process control from the standpoint of communism. Stalinism may for a time have suspended the law of value as a means of economic regulation, but without bringing about a move towards planning, which can only be conscious, democratic and global. Social democracy has done the same in more partial ways, where capital remains the direct form of surplus extraction. Imposing limits upon the law of value only preserves it. During an entire historical period the prevention of communism has been, and remains, for capital, the pressing requirement, even where the resulting social forms are barriers to the self-expansion of capital.

Radical Chains exists in order to develop revolutionary critique and thus to carve out a theoretical space within which the need for and movement towards human emancipation can be explored. This objective requires the re-evaluation of categories and concepts which have previously been debased. This does not simply necessitate a project of recovery, but an attempt to forge new categories and concepts appropriate to our own period.

We are not a party, nor even the nucleus of one, though we aim to develop as a contributing strand towards a future formation. The revolutionary party of the proletariat will not come into being without a revolutionary movement in the working class. In the meantime, the closest available approximation to such a party necessarily takes the form of dispersed individuals and groups, of which *Radical Chains* is one. To declare a political party nucleus prematurely without recognition of the complexity of the prevention of communism is to create yet another barrier against proletarian self-formation, and to perpetuate the dispersal.

In this period of deepening decay and disruption, our starting point can only be the need for free association and the potential for abundance.

Contents

- 7 Baruch Hirson on Chris Hani
- 9 Harry Cleaver debates Hillel Ticktin
- 18 The leopard in the 20th century value, struggle & administration
- 28 Sendero Luminoso
- 32 Review of Hillel Ticktin's *Origins of the Crisis in the USSR*
- 37 Football and Reviews of: *Poll Tax Rebellion*, *A Meeting of Minds (The Socialist Society)*, *The Trotsky Reappraisal*.

This issue was produced by William Dixon, David Gorman, M.K., Mike Neary and Bob Shepherd.

Disagreement and debate is vital for the development of revolutionary theory. Articles in *Radical Chains* express a range of differing views and pieces critical of articles in the journal are especially welcome. Contributions should ideally be sent on 3.5" IBM compatible discs, although type-written copy will also be accepted.

Radical Chains helps to organise regular discussion meetings in London along with other groups and individuals of differing political outlooks. Anyone who wants to come along should get in touch with us for details (or come and see us at the Critique conference in January).

Distribution of communist literature is becoming increasingly difficult, so if you think you can sell *Radical Chains* or get your local bookshop to stock it, please contact us and we will send you copies on a 'sale or return' basis.

Apologies for the delay between issues 3 and 4, and for the fact that some advertised articles have not been included. Due to lack of space these have been held back and will appear in issue 5. Apologies also to subscribers who have not yet received issue 4. This is because we have lost part of our subscribers list and we would urge you to get in touch with us as soon as possible so that we can sort things out.

Write to us at: **BM Radical Chains**, London WC1N 3XX

Europe: nationalism or class struggle

William Dixon

The virtual breakdown of the ERM, the European monetary system, appeared to be a purely technical phenomenon. It could be claimed that currencies such as the pound were overvalued or that there did not exist adequate controls over the movements of capital, so speculative money could destroy the system. Such considerations would appear to exclude action by the working class as in any way responsible. This view is supported by the absence of any significant class struggle in Britain that could be identified as having led to the departure of the pound from the ERM. Yet, despite this absence it is still the working class that lurks behind the various terms and categories used in the debate. The difficulty is in uncovering the often tortuous mediations through which class struggle appears.

One important category used in the debate has been that of unemployment. It is a category into which the class struggle has been compacted. The reason for capital to be concerned about unemployment is not profit but the threat to political stability. This is not immediate and nor does it even necessarily mean the unemployed themselves, although this is not ruled out. As the absence of work it is the absence of the preferred means of social organisation and reward. Long term unemployment threatens the political order; it opens to question all political institutions and promises a polarisation of political positions. It opens the possibility of a real crisis, not just some spectacular adjustment on the stock exchange but a more serious political crisis within the ruling class as they argue about the best course of action.

The actual category unemployment poses the social question of capital as one concerning the continued provision of work. In this way it tends to mediate the struggle posing the interests of the class as synonymous with accumulation. The problem for capital is that this mediation does require a delivery of its promise that accumulation does not, perhaps now, cannot deliver.

We have already seen something of the impact of the class through this compacted category unemployment in the debate over Europe. The problem for capital is to devise the appropriate arrangements so that the class struggle is subsumed within them. The Keynesian arrangements did for a period successfully achieve this. Capital temporarily gained a real objectivity; struggle was channelled via productivity into accumulation. Of course this objec-



tivity did not last. The post war arrangement became incapable of containing the struggle. This opened up a period in which capital must re-assert its objectivity through crisis. In many ways this has been successful. The free market policies and new technologies, by reimposing absolute poverty, have made unemployment work for capital. However for this to be consolidated the old national restrictions on labour needed to be dissolved.

The dream of a unified Europe is of a single market in both capital and labour. The crucial element in this is of course the competition of labour for jobs from a capital with no loyalties to anything but profit. All the convergence requirements of the Maastricht Treaty have been designed to erase the vestiges of the old arterio-sclerotic Europe, the Europe of national working classes achieving national welfare deals of different kinds, but that lead to a form of leapfrogging and the export of inflation. The problem with convergence would be its success, eradication of the national peculiarities that each bourgeoisie share as their common totems of control. These peculiarities are either backward nostalgias for non-existent pasts, or are distinctions of dress, style of shoe and trouser, of crease and rumple, distinctions in sporting or culinary preference that are so inane that they may exercise the mind but not the intelligence. It is no accident that these several peculiarities that various nations have in common all tend to favour the continuation in power of the same tired gang (tradition). The peculiarities have assisted the bourgeoisie. Here nationalism has undoubtedly been the most reactionary and in fact murderous force in the history of capitalism. In its name social crisis is reduced to the construction of enemies.

Now the problem is that, with the attempt to create the unified Europe, tried and tested formulas of nationalism are in threat. We should not be surprised if the

unbelievably crude Thatcher and all her cronies should be so against Europe. Was it not nationalism that saved her miserable reputation with the Falklands? She certainly did not miss the Labour Party grovelling during that episode as any loyal opposition should. These Tory anti-Europeans have a nostalgia for nostalgia. They perceive that in troubled times nationalism still has a card to play, a few more bodies may be piled up in tribute to it. They perceive a danger in Europe as a market without appropriate political institutions. This is a real danger for order. Convergence forced political tensions on Europe as different areas were faced by punitive interest rates, or tax rises, reductions in social spending and all with increasing unemployment. The Bundesbank though in the position to act as a European Bank did not. Indeed there seems nothing substantial in Europe to make up for what is lost as the distinctiveness of the nations is dissolved. In this situation the right talks of national unemployment and national policy.

One way offered to preserve the dream of a Europe for capital is a consolidated attack on the working class. In this case the aim will be reductions in what are called social costs. This prospect is being talked about in relation to the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty. There will be an attempt to organise the working classes into outdoing each other in giving up social benefits. We have already seen this spectre at the micro level in the moving of Hoover production from France to Cambuslang in Scotland. Where a similar deal was offered at Dundee-Timex and was faced by stout resistance, despite the union, the company simply closed down. Profit is capital's national home.

The lines between the so called third world and the west have little meaning when employment can be moved so easily. The USA working class, as well as the European, have been learning this hard lesson of international solidarity. The conditions of work, of contracts, of social benefits of workers several thousand miles away become a matter of practical concern when factories move across the world. Repression abroad arrives here as a natural necessity to work harder, as a plausible requirement to reduce social costs, as the need to do this, do that for work.

Both sides in the dispute over Europe have this much in common; they know the working class must work harder for less. Even Mr Major with all the verve and fascination of two short planks is well aware that attacking the working class is where the heart is. The real difference is in

Profit is capital's national home

the perceptions of the adequate political framework for organising the shambles. If the working classes are to compete across the world for jobs should not there be an even greater reliance on the nation as a means of preserving division across Europe, of competition of French and British etc etc, rather than workforces without any country. Or perhaps the nation should be more intimate with increased regionalisation of our treasured peculiarities? Thatcher and that lot do not appear to want to go that far. In fact the situation is difficult enough that it offers us the prospect of a real crisis in the Tory party. How that will spread it is impossible to say in advance. We can expect a more vicious polarisation on the right as a result. On the other hand if the national working class, rather than particular workforces, is to compete conditions of work downwards then maybe the Labour Party still has a role to play as a Party of Government. Unemployment will be the catchphrase, the national emergency will be its arena, sacrifices will be the game.

Adequate understanding of such events will require an analysis of capital as combining objective and subjective factors. Several articles in *Radical Chains* have attempted this but only as a beginning. An

important theme arising from these attempts has been that the left itself has constituted a barrier to the movement to communism. The roots of the present revolutionary left are still firmly in the post 1945 period. A theoretical legacy of this is the tendency to deal with the objective and subjective as separate spheres. This separation in theory is a real result of the prevention of communism in the twentieth century.

The tendency of the revolutionary left is to fail to grasp real developments and instead rely on sectarianism. We can identify two broad strands, both tending to subjectivism. One side, usually Leninist, stresses objective factors that will lead to a situation in which the class will become revolutionary. The problem is that objective conditions keep maturing without there being a revolution. In effect the objective is frozen within the analysis. The leap is then to excessively subjective explanations, often but not always implicit rather than explicit. We find here that the working class has failed whilst the party has to work even harder to overcome the obstacles to consciousness. The party itself becomes the frantic island of sanity.

The alternative view, we can call it

The left itself has constituted a barrier to the movement to communism

anarcho-marxist, starts from the class itself by rejecting the notion that the struggle of the class has been ineffective. It rejects for example the usual notion of economism and instead stresses the oppositional nature of the struggle. This again tends to excessive subjectivism as the revolutionaries frantically attempt to convey the truth to the world. Explanations for the absence of communism must identify betrayals, lies, etc. So both sides tend to sectarianism. Particular pre-mapped paths become the truth.

The crucial thing for the revolutionary left is to come to terms with the extent to which it has lost the perspective of communism. No single strand is privileged with the necessary view of the whole movement. We cannot simply discover the right ideas bolstered by our favourite book of quotes. Nor can re-thinking be achieved through rehashing. One problem is the immediate situation of much of the left, its organisational and social structures. The needs of their members tends to obstruct the threat to the organisation from re-thinking. There are no innocents ordained with truth and position, those who act so merely recreate the crimes of the past. There are only participants for whom tension is necessary.

Letters are welcome and should be addressed to BM Radical Chains, London WC1N 3XX

Correspondence

From George Gordon.

I recently attended the public debate between Harry Cleaver and Hillel Ticktin on 5 July in London, organised by *Radical Chains*. I wasn't too interested in what Ticktin had to say (he's an unreconstructed Trotskyist) but I listened intently to what was said by Mr. Cleaver to get an idea of the real political approach behind his (often brilliant) writings about economics and ruling class strategy. My worst suspicions were confirmed. I have no hesitation in saying that Cleaver's approach is essentially just the old leftist racket of finding half plausible Marxist justifications for supporting liberal, 'progressive' politics. At one stage he claimed that 'unlike those who have abandoned Marxism', he did not like or use the term 'new social movements' because he thought that things often described as 'black struggles' or 'women's struggles' are actually expressions of the class struggle. He then went on to spend the rest of the evening talking as if he did believe in 'new social movements', referring completely un-self-

consciously to 'the black community', 'women's struggles', 'what blacks/women want'... without any reference to class whatsoever. The most obscene example of this came right at the end when he referred to proposals made by the gang leaders in L.A. as an example of 'what black people want'. You may recall that these proposals included the policing of labour discipline by the gangs - so much for the refusal of work!

It's interesting how common it is for vehement anti-Leninists (which Cleaver is) to think in a very similar way to Leninists (although their methods of organisation are very different). It became more and more obvious that behind Cleaver's comments about what ordinary people want lay the assumption that there are basically two types of people involved in struggle - on the one hand 'ordinary decent' types who don't have much politics but do have hearts of gold and on the other (implicitly middle class, academic) people who do have politics but are not directly involved in struggle and need to find ways of 'relating' to those who are. It's a problem of getting the message across - you can't be too critical of ordinary people because that might put them off. When he was talking about 'what people want' he mentioned with approval Marx's *Workers' Enquiry*

which was a list of questions to ask workers. He then said something along the lines of: 'This is what we should be doing today. Go to the factories, go to the black community, go to the students, go to the women's movement... find out what people want'. O.K., it's not quite the same as what Bob Avakian (*leader of the Marxist RCP in the USA* ... ed.) would say... But...

To a certain extent he was just recognising his unusual position as a Marxist academic. What was offensive is that he was assuming that the audience must be composed of people of a similar social role.

I would describe Cleaver's overall position as 'council communism without the workers' council'. As with other 'councilists' there is a lot of truth in what he says. He stresses the need for workers to form direct links with each other rather than 'unite and fight' through adopting a common ideology or joining the same party. He rightly stresses the enormous diversity of the class struggle and how it is reactionary to try to impose a uniform way of doing things. It is true that a proletarian community of struggle is, and needs to be, diverse. But it still needs to be a community *not* (as I think Cleaver wants) a liberal multi-cultural swamp where everybody respects everybody else's views.

He is aware that the trade unions are against the workers (I know this because I had a conversation with him the day before in which he argued with someone who was trying to argue that workers used unions to organise struggles despite the reactionary leadership). However, when it comes to popular fronts containing 'Labor Organisations' this criticism is forgotten. In this particular case he was talking about the network of groups which was set up to oppose North American Free Trade Agreement, something which he sees as very positive.

What Cleaver's approach appears to offer is the possibility of being involved in struggle without having to bother about strategic questions (at least not in practice). No doubt if you tried (for example) to attack nationalism in general (black nationalism in US cities, National liberation movements, the implicit US nationalism of people defending 'constitutional rights'... and so on) you would be accused of trying to impose uniformity on diverse movements. In other words his brand of autonomism offers the possibility of 'keeping politics out of politics'. In practice this always means 'leave politics to the politicians'.

3 out of 10, professor, must try harder!

Escaping the 20th century

M.K.

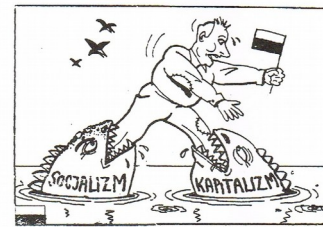
Socialism is dead or dying. Soviet-style Stalinism has collapsed. Labour Party-style social democracy now offers no alternative to market austerity and very few people believe in any sort of revolutionary socialism. Yet we should not regret its passing.

Socialism did not fail because people are intrinsically selfish, greedy or incapable of working together. After all, the various socialist regimes were never based on workers' democracy from below, but on state administration imposed from above. They had little in common with Marx's vision of communism, a society in which the working class has abolished exploitation, and therefore both money and the state have become unnecessary.

These regimes first came to power in the revolutionary upheavals that ended the First World War. Even then they were never intended to be fully controlled by workers. The Bolsheviks did lead 900 workers' councils or soviets to power in October 1917, but they also rejected the factory committees' proposals for democratic self-management of industry well before the civil war. Within eight months economic collapse combined with alienation from the working class created a situation in which Lenin's regime was resorting to widespread arrests, censorship and even shootings to repress strikes. A few months later the first social democratic government in Germany organised the slaughter of thousands to crush revolution there.

Since then these socialisms have acted as a barrier to any real tendencies towards communism by persuading workers that they need not take power directly and that they could rely on 'their' socialist governments to make changes for them (even the anarchists in the Spanish civil war supported the Popular Front government so enabling it to crush the revolution there). Not only did the Communist Parties in the East totally discredit socialism by slaughtering millions, but in the West they reigned back potentially revolutionary situations both after World War Two and after the May '68 upheavals in France.

There were, of course, considerable social improvements in this period, but these were not due to the benevolence of politicians; they were due to strikes and other forms of working class pressure which convinced governments of all political hues that they would never get social peace unless they provided comprehensive welfare services. As the Tory Lord Hailsham, said in the 1940s: "If you



A cartoon from Poland

do not give the people social reform they are going to give you social revolution."

By restructuring the system to formally recognise working class needs capitalism was temporarily stabilised. However, these reforms also laid the basis for the next cycle of struggles, the strikes and counter-cultural rebellions of the '60s and '70s, which demanded much more and pointed beyond all possible reform.

This 'revolt against work' restricted profitability and provoked a major crisis, compelling governments East and West to attempt to return to the market to restructure industry, discipline workers and weaken their collective strength. In Britain this was begun with the mass unemployment and welfare and wage cuts of the last Labour government, which paved the way for the Tory offensive of recent times. In Soviet-style societies repression had made it impossible for workers to organise collectively but, despite this, they could still rebel individually, with sabotage, absenteeism and slow-working and this contributed to the collapse of their systems. Since then the Stalinist bureaucracies have also attempted to return to the market but this has had little success and has led to chaos from Yugoslavia to Russia.

Having discredited, not only the name of communism, but the whole idea of radical change, these *preventions of communism*, are now largely bankrupt, yet many revolutionaries seem to wish to revive them. Most Trotskyists still call for trade union bureaucrats to lead strikes or for workers to vote Labour 'with no illusions'. Whatever their real intentions these tactics can only have the effect of maintaining illusions in a Labour left whose failure to lead any real fightback, from the GLC to Arthur Scargill, is what has demoralised and demobilised so many people over the years. The SWP's recent reprinting of Lenin's defence of similar policies from 1921, *Left-wing Communism: an*

infantile disorder, shows the inability of even these 'revisionist' Trotskyists to really develop their ideas beyond those of the old Bolshevik leaders.

A few groups, such as the RCP who produce *Living Marxism*, have attempted some rethinking. Unlike more conventional Trotskyists they tend to concentrate on capitalism as a whole and so do not end up implying that the main cause of the crisis is simply the Tory party or that the main source of racism is the BNP. However, despite all their talk of being new and different, their basic Marxist theory has not developed much beyond that of Lenin. While they were right to say that the left's call for Western intervention or arming Bosnian nationalists showed their bankruptcy, their unimaginative alternative of waiting for the West to bomb Serbia so they could start backing Serbia against the West was no more radical than Russia's support for Serbia, or indeed Germany's support for Croatia or the US's for Bosnia. Such Leninist support for 'oppressed' nationalisms not only always effectively ends up supporting viciously anti-working class regimes but also rival imperialisms. Now that the role of national liberation movements such as the ANC and the PLO has evolved from one of largely recuperating and misdirecting working class struggles to one of openly policing them, the totally reactionary nature of any sort of nationalism could not be more clear.

This was the argument of many Marxists, including Luxemburg, who debated Lenin on this and other issues. Many left communists also argued that revolutionaries should not try to take power themselves but merely inspire workers to do so and they developed a radical critique of trade unions. These ideas seem particularly relevant in a period when the unions, from Timex to Burnsalls to UCH, have so systematically stifled anger and prevented strikes from spreading. However the left communists' critiques of many of the forms that contained the working class this century, such as bourgeois democracy and anti-fascist fronts, were lost to a left dazzled by the apparent success of the Soviet regime. Although a revolutionary Marxism more relevant to the post-war period was later developed by the situationists in France and the autonomists in Italy most revolutionaries never went beyond a rigid Leninism; in fact radicals were as likely to develop insights in the anarchist, feminist or green movements as in any Marxist groups.

This led to the present situation where much of the left still has no real under-

Socialism is dead or dying ... Yet we should not regret its passing

standing that it was the contradictions created by the power of the working class that lead to the collapse of the socialist alternative, and that capitalism's recent policies of economic crisis and deindustrialization were specifically strategies that attempted to contain the revolts of the 60s and 70s and escape the working class. Without this as a starting point the left can only see this process as a defeat and so put its energies into trying to revive various moribund institutions. Either, like most Trotskyists, they are trying to resurrect the old Labour movement, or, like the RCP, they are apparently giving up on class struggle and putting all their faith in the strategies of the party elite (or even putting their faith in even more absurd icons: witness the support some still give to Castro's Cuba which, since the collapse of Soviet subsidies, can no longer even supply the welfare benefits that in the past might have been used to justify a lack of civil liberties worse than many of the old East European regimes).

This is not to say that non-Leninist communists have all the answers on how recent class struggles, whether in the form of strikes, street protests or campaigns like

that around the poll tax, can expand into a new working class movement... far from it. While the left's usual accusation that these 'ultra-lefts' do nothing more than abstractly call for revolution is blatantly untrue, it is true that many of them are as unthinking and dogmatically defensive as any Leninists and their failure to organise beyond small unstable groups can often make Leninist parties seem an attractive alternative. The marginalisation of these groups and individuals has created a situation of isolation, lack of debate and inadequate theory that shows that they are as much a product of the containment of communism as any other tendency; tragically we are all part of the mess that the left found itself in this century. We can only escape by learning from all the various revolutionary traditions, Leninist and non-Leninist, in order to create a Marxism, going beyond both Lenin and Marx, a politics relevant for the next century.

It is unfortunate that this article appears to be slagging off all the rest of the left in typical sectarian fashion, but all contemporary theories, not least of those those in this journal, do need to be critiqued and superseded. Of course there is much

All contemporary theories, not least of those those in this journal, do need to be critiqued and superseded

more to revolutionary politics than just developing the 'correct' theory and more insights will come from activity than academic-style debate, but the left does need to understand and explain the world if it is to offer anything to the working class and be able to encourage rather than hinder any tendencies towards communism.

Talk of such a communist revolution seems ridiculously utopian in today's climate but we should not forget that virtually no-one predicted the explosions of workers' struggles at the end of the '60s. Although at present people lack confidence in real social change, they are still far less subservient than previous generations and it does appear that our rulers have no way out of their present underlying economic crisis. This crisis of both the market and of any attempts at socialist bureaucratic administrations show that modern society will never stabilise until it is based on workers' democracy, until we can implement communism. The present anger about declining living standards indicates considerable potential for the future provided those who claim to be revolutionaries become an inspiration rather than a barrier to such revolution.

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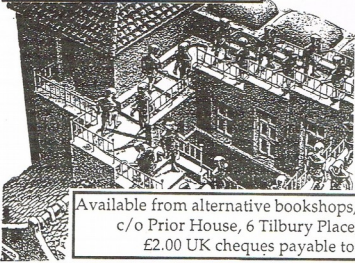
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Searchlight South Africa was the first publication to expose the ANC's suppression of the 1984 mutiny. Here its editor, **Baruch Hirson**, writes about **Chris Hani**

Murder as a political weapon: a South African scenario

On 10 April 1993 Chris Hani, nationalist leader, secretary of the South African Communist Party, one time Chief of Staff of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (the ANC armed force), was assassinated outside his home in a small town near Johannesburg. The curious position of this man and the crisis that this has raised has more than local interest. It requires socialists everywhere to pose the most awkward of questions.

How is it that in this era in which the so-called communist movement is in almost universal disarray, a national secretary of the local Communist Party should be deemed a hero? What was the nature of his 'communism'? What was his role in the mutiny of the armed forces of the ANC? Did he help suppress a strike in the Transkei after he returned from exile? Why was he considered a nationalist hero?

The questions could go further, but it is through an examination of the above posers that it might be possible to gain an insight, not only to the man but also the society that nurtured him. It should also lead to some important considerations about the objectives of the left in this period of social decay.

First, some background. Hani was educated in the Eastern Cape at Lovedale and then Fort Hare, both of them segregated institutions in the Transkei. Lovedale was one of the better schools for Africans; Fort Hare was designated a University for Xhosa speaking students after strict apartheid was introduced in 1959. Hani took a BA degree in the humanities before leaving the country. Then he left South Africa to join *Umkhonto we Sizwe*.

Hani was part of a group of guerrillas involved in a disastrous incursion into Rhodesia in 1967 from which few emerged alive. To his credit he was one of the few men who later stood up and criticized the leadership for their mishandling of the operation. It is reported that the leader of the armed forces demanded that he be shot for his outspoken criticism.

Hani escaped with his life and was posted to Lesotho shortly thereafter, in charge of infiltrating men into South Africa. There is no information about his military or political skills. Hani is not credited with any campaign (although there are myths about some activities that do not bear scrutiny). There are also no known publications to his name, no political statements, and although he joined the Communist Party and became a leading official, no criticisms of events in the USSR, in Eastern Europe, or in other regions that named themselves socialist or communist. To all intents he was faceless, yet he rose to be an army commissar and then Chief of Staff of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* and secretary of the Communist Party, both in succession to Joe Slovo. Furthermore, when the SACP met in conference in 1989 and praised the USSR for its achievements, Hani did not dissent. More recently he has visited China and Cuba and, in both cases, he either saw no faults or, if he did, never mentioned them publicly.

In sum, outside of mythology, Hani was a commander of an army

that saw no action in South Africa. Politically he was a 'yes-man', able to accept everything that the SACP said, not known to have ever criticised the monstrous deeds of the world movement in which he rose to leadership. Nor did he ever utter a word that can allow for an assessment of his political views. How could he? It is said of this leader of 'communism' that he had never read any of Marx's works.

How then does such a man become a leader, a figure of veneration and also, if the newspaper accounts are to be believed, a man of immense learning and great erudition? At the outset it must be said that so desperate are the people in the black townships, that they will rally to any personality they see as their champion. Their extreme poverty and deprivation, their squalid squatter camp homes, and their helplessness in the face of daily violence, leave them in despair. They are also part of a vast population rendered illiterate by a rotten school system coupled with over a decade of boycotts that kept the schools closed. They seek a saviour, and who better than an army leader, capable, it is thought, of mobilizing them against the state's armed forces? His so-called communism dovetails with the hope of a new egalitarian society and, in any case, government propaganda against communism only made it more attractive to the dispossessed. What did it matter if Hani knew little more than them about the meaning of communism? His ignorance could only enhance him in the eyes of his admirers. The myth became fact in the case of Hani, and nobody sought to disillusion his followers, neither in life or in death.

Hani became a figure of interest to the left on two particular accounts. Firstly, by virtue of his involvement as an executioner in the mutiny of 1984 in *Umkhonto we Sizwe*. Secondly, because of his closeness to General Bantu Holomisa, the man who toppled the corrupt government of the Transkei and took control of the region.

Hani's position in the mutiny is of major interest. The events that led to the uprising, which involved the vast majority of troops arose from a number of interconnecting factors. The troops of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* in the Angolan camps were dispirited. They claimed that there was no democracy in the ANC and that the leaders were self appointed. Secondly, they said that their task was not to fight the Angolan opposition army, Unita, but to move into action against the South African government. For this they demanded that they be led in battle inside South Africa. Thirdly, they objected to being used in the many smuggling ventures in which their leaders (although, it appears, not Hani) were involved.

After a number of smaller upheavals there was a rising of considerable numbers, at Viana camp in Angola. In this case there was an additional factor. The troops were sickened by the torture and the treatment of dissidents in the army.

The mutiny was suppressed when the Angolan army was summoned and, at a tribunal, men accused of being the ring-leaders, were sentenced to death. It has been claimed by former mutineers that Hani was on the tribunal and/or witnessed the executions. The evidence is not clear cut, but Hani was in the camp when this occurred. His own claim, published in the South African journal *Work in Progress*, is that he opposed the executions and flew to Lusaka to get the ANC leaders to stop the killing. This is ingenious. Hani, as army commissar was the senior *Umkhonto* man present and could have ordered an end to the brutality. He did not.

Hani did nothing to redress the wrongs of 1984 and, when the inmates of an ANC camp in east Africa elected a majority of ex-mutineers to the camp committee, Hani travelled there post haste to oversee the dissolution of the democratically elected committee.

When next heard of, after the unbanning of the ANC and other organisations, Hani was installed in the nominally independent Transkei. Once again the details are blurred but there were reports which indicated that Hani and his army comrades were installed in the presidential residence and that they had assisted Holomisa in putting down a local strike. All in the best of Stalinist traditions, even if our man in the Transkei had not read his Stalin.

In the Commissions of Enquiry, of which there have been three, the facts of the mutiny, the repression and the tortures, are now well established. Details of this are carried in *Searchlight South Africa* No 10, April 1993. What was not disclosed is the names of all those responsible for the tortures and executions. It seems certain that Hani bears direct responsibility for the latter. But even if he did not give the orders, his position in the ANC army makes him culpable. It is possible that his martyrdom at the hand of an assassin will allow the investigators to draw a veil over his guilt.

The assassination must also draw attention to the circumstances under which Hani was shot. It is hardly necessary to state that Hani's lack of security, which included the dismissing of his bodyguard over the Easter weekend, was not the action of a man with military experience. Obviously, a determined assassin can always strike, but to offer an opportunity such as Hani did on that fatal morning is beyond understanding.

The second fact was the use by the conspirators of a Pole. It is a telling indictment of the former Stalinist countries that in their long period of control of the states in Eastern Europe, they reared so many people who opposed the existing regimes and that so many have appeared in recent years as skinheads, racists, fascists, or generally members of extreme right-wing gangs. The forces of reaction to the Stalinist states, so obviously widespread, were both positive and negative, but little was said about them by those who were one-time admirers of these states in the Communist Party in South Africa. However, the crucial factor in this case was the eagerness with which the South African government went out to recruit such personnel to bolster their white supremacy policy. Such people, added to hardened racists from Zimbabwe and Mozambique and extremists from within the local population, provide the membership for right wing groups and parties. These are men and women dedicated to race supremacy who will use every method to maintain their privileged position.

Behind them stand the elements of South Africa's Military Intelligence which have been responsible for the wave of killings in the country over the past decade. This body, which has been allowed, or encouraged, by the government to remove opposition leaders is still intact. It is a force with a public presence but a covert set of operations that will persist in its destabilising course until forcibly broken up.

The continued killings, although less dramatic than assassination, are not the work of white racists alone. The spectre of terror has gripped the country, embracing murder in the black townships, (black) taxi-rank war, white vigilante sniping, random sectarian attacks and pitched battles between the Inkatha Freedom Party, the ANC, the Pan-Africanist Congress, and other smaller groups. Some of these bodies are more horrible than others, none offer the hope of social change and democratic rights.

There was a time when revolutionaries called for the arming of the people in order to usher in a new society. It is doubtful whether this would be an appropriate solution for South Africa today. It could be more useful to call for the disarming of the population, except for the obvious conclusion that this would leave the state police and army as arbiters of the country's fate and that opens the way to political suicide. Quite obviously, however, a disciplined armed force under trade union (or similar) control would be an answer, if it was achievable. Given the political climate in the country today, this does not seem possible.

It is at this point that other options must be considered, and that takes me back to the issue of the mutiny. Consequent on the publicity given to this event, and the equally nasty prison camps run by the South West African Peoples Organisation (Swapo), in *Searchlight South Africa*, a Campaign for Justice in Southern Africa was launched. This small group of individuals called for an International Commissions of Inquiry into these events; campaigned for the release of men kept in prisons in central and east

Africa on behalf of the ANC security department; demanded statements from Nelson Mandela and the ANC; called on Amnesty International to investigate these matters, and so on. By persistent action remarkable successes have been recorded. Men have been released from prisons, the ANC was forced (literally dragged) into investigating the mutiny, and there has been widespread publicity over the mutiny in South Africa. The article exposing the mutiny in *Searchlight South Africa* No 5 was translated into Zulu and reprinted in three issues in the Natal based paper, *Umfrika*. The Namibian leaders, living in the new luxury derived from their political positions in the country, have ignored the calls for an inquiry into the prison pits they created in Angola.

In raising the issues, the Campaign for Justice saw beyond the fate of individuals, as important as that aspect might have been. The question of civil rights, of justice and equality of justice, and of the right to walk free and talk openly, are central to the demands of all socialists - whatever our criticism of the way such matters are viewed in contemporary societies. This is a moral dimension of the socialist perspective that has been overshadowed by other considerations for too long a time. The failure to press these demands allowed the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe to ride roughshod over the rights of their populations. Yet it was the basic right of individuals to be protected from arbitrary repressive forces that was once the concern of socialists. A return to basic considerations demands that a new sense of moral purpose inform Marxists.

It is too soon to determine what factors will be required to rescue socialism from the chasm of despair that followed the collapse of the states of Eastern Europe. That it must revive is certain, but when it does it will require new values, able to by-pass revived elements of Stalinism (whether in Russia, Yugoslavia or South Africa) and set an agenda that points a way to a socialism unsullied by the practices of the past 75 years. A campaign for justice, against victims of state violence and against the cynicism of nationalist movements might well provide one of the crucial slogans in the coming years.

Postscript: Nothing New out of Africa

Charles Ngakula has been appointed to succeed Chris Hani as general secretary of the South African Communist Party. He is reported in *The Guardian* (30 April 1993) as saying that he and his friends do not talk about the collapse of the USSR and its satellites. 'We are talking about resurgence. Communist parties in a number of these countries are beginning to resurface. Some have even won elections'.

Although apparently jolted by the events of 1989-91, Ngakula says, they sat down and analyzed the factors that led to the collapse and looked to their own party to see what lessons could be learnt. It is perhaps unbecoming to be sarcastic about his observations, but what can be said about his new understanding, as spelt out by the life-long Stalinist, Joe Slovo: who suddenly discovered, first that Gorbachev was the most important thinker after Lenin in the USSR and then led him to pronounce the need for a 'democracy' that consisted (in a 'sunset scenario') of a power sharing government comprising the National Party of de Klerk and the ANC?

Ngakula, it must be added, was trained in military and espionage work by the NKVD in the USSR, the Stasi in East Germany, and in Angola. Did his new understanding come out of his training in those models of 'democracy'.

Editorial Note.

Baruch Hiron wrote this article in May 1993, shortly after Hani's assassination. In August, the ANC published a report which, despite its fudging of the issues, admitted that Hani was guilty of sending people to Viana camp although he knew what was happening there. In all the hype surrounding Hani's death, Searchlight South Africa was virtually the only publication in this country to publicly criticise the man.

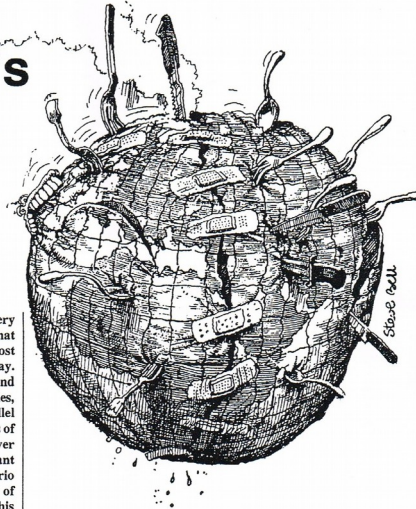
Harry Cleaver debates Hillel Ticktin

on capitalism's present crisis ... danger and opportunity

It's not often that you can bring together people from very different revolutionary traditions for a public debate that attracts one hundred and thirty five people who represent most strands of the revolutionary left as it exists in this country today. Harry Cleaver, a former editor of the journal *ZeroWork* and author of *Reading Capital Politically* (Harvester/Humanities, 1979), was one participant in this debate. The other was Hillel Ticktin, editor of the journal *Critique* and author of a series of important articles on the political economy of the USSR. Cleaver is an American who has drawn on and developed the important work of Italian autonomists such as Toni Negri and Mario Tronti, helping to challenge various 'orthodox' versions of marxism and placing class struggle firmly at the centre of his analysis. Ticktin, of South African origin, is closer to the trotskyst tradition (although he carefully distances himself from the orthodox trotskysm of the Fourth International) but no less innovative than the autonomists in his approach which has helped stress the importance of the law of value.

The debate was organised by *Radical Chains* in conjunction with the autonomist magazine *London Notes*. The organisers believed that there is not enough interchange between the different fragments of the marxist tradition and when they heard that Cleaver would be visiting Britain in July they decided to ask him if he would debate with Ticktin. While there has always been a degree of criticism *within* autonomism or *within* trotskysm or *within* situationism, critical engagement *between* different traditions has been rare. It is this engagement of the adherents of one tradition with the ideas of another which is necessary if the fragmentation and dispersal of the revolutionary left is to be overcome.

The debate was transcribed by Mike Neary and David Gorman and edited by David Gorman. The most interesting contributions from the floor have been included, together with responses from the speakers. Because of the success of the event, *Radical Chains* intends to hold further debates on a range of topics in the future.



Hillel Ticktin:

When looking at the present capitalist crisis it appears to me that there are four aspects to it. Since it's not possible for me to go into any detail in twenty minutes I am just going to have to assume that people have some understanding of certain of the concepts. So in the first instance it seems to me we are talking about the long wave and a long term downturn that began roughly in 1973. My view of the long wave is not the same as Ernest Mandel who most people would identify with it. I'd see it much rather in a kind of classical way which underlies what I am going to say and might differentiate me, I'm not at all certain, from the other speaker.

That is to say, if one looks at the movement of history in marxist terms, there are always two aspects to it: the movement in the categories themselves and the class struggle. And it seems to me the art or duty of the marxist is to be able to put the two together correctly to see how, in fact, the form of the class struggle is merging with movement of the categories. If one simply analyses the movement of the class struggle you will not understand the history. All you do is end up with an amount of empirical detail, which is useful but which will not really give you a proper understanding of the nature

of the economic system or movement. So one has to understand the categories. In other words, in this instance, one has to understand what is happening to value, to accumulation. Now the difference I think that have with Mandel here is that Mandel looks at it in a much more technical way and would place much more accent effectively on accumulation and technological change. I don't. For me the long waves are much more to do with changes which are related to accumulation which in turn is related to the class struggle itself. Accumulation has proceeded to a certain point, the class struggle has become so intense, that the capitalist class sees the only solution in pulling the plug. If one can put it that way. And I think that is precisely what happened in 1973.

In 1973 they realised - I think it was completely conscious - that unless they went for a long term downturn and raised the level of unemployment, they would be faced with increasing demands for control over production. The result was the permanent mass unemployment that we have seen over the last twenty to thirty years. But what they also did, and that's the second aspect of this crisis, was to go for finance capital. That is to say, they switched from the overall decision that had been made by the capitalist class of 1940, and made more permanent in 1945 when they decided to go for industrial capital.

If you look at it historically, when referring to the world capitalist economic structure the various documents of the Comintern constantly refer to finance capital. If you look at Trotsky and Lenin, they refer to finance capital and never to anything else. Now quite clearly what happened after 1940-45 was again a deliberate decision by the capitalist class to go for growth, which had enormous effects. It changed the whole mode of accumulation, leading to the possibility of a welfare state which otherwise would not have been possible. But in 1973, by pulling that plug, everything was of course called into question. And then effectively they turned towards finance capital. In effect they took one step back and saw to it that they received their surplus value indirectly - through interest, rent, insurance companies, pension funds, and so on, rather than immediately through production. This appeared to be at some distance from the working class, and it appeared much easier for the capitalist class to actually extract its surplus value through this form.

Now what has happened is that this twenty year period has come to an end. It's fairly obvious that one cannot go on extracting surplus value in this way without killing the host. The parasite finance capital can't go on taking surplus value from industry without industry itself being harmed. Now it's quite obvious in the case of Britain, but it is not only true of Britain of course. Inevitably there would have to be an end to this. There would have to be a downturn. At some point industry could not supply the surplus value and the attempt to make money out of money would come to an end, and of course it did come to an end in 1989. Which effectively means that the strategy to which they turned after 1973 has come to an end. That is to say finance capital has exhausted itself.

But this crisis has now shown itself in another form which, in a certain sense they didn't anticipate. And this raises two questions. One is the question of long term decline; the other is the question of stalinism. You will not find stalinism as a political-economic concept of Western capitalism in many marxist textbooks or marxist theorists but it seems to me it's absolutely fundamental in understanding modern capitalism. It is precisely the explosion or implosion or death of stalinism which is now creating a crisis of a kind that has not existed in capitalism for now sixty to seventy years. One has to understand what is lying behind it. It seems to me, to come to another point, that at least since 1917, or some other date in the early part of this century, we are talking about a decline in capitalism and if one is talking about a decline in capitalism, then there are not many solutions available to capitalism itself. In effect declining capitalism can only do one thing - it can delay. It can't succeed in

avoiding its own overthrow. But it can delay it. Some people might want to argue it can delay it 300 years, 500, a thousand years, I wouldn't argue that. I don't think it can delay it all that long. But it has had a whole series of forms of delay and I have actually mentioned one, that's finance capital, and one can go into the other forms as well.

Now the obvious immediate forms which come to mind are social democracy and stalinism. I see them not just as subjective forms but as objective forms. If social democracy did not actually come to power, it did come to a position where it was governing at some sort of level, and we did have a welfare state and that again affected accumulation itself. Stalinism was embodied in Eastern Europe and China and so on. These were objective facts in history, they were objectified. And it appears to me that it was precisely these that acted as the subjective forms of delay, of maintaining capitalism, in other words. The problem is that both are dying or dead, and the capitalist class does not appear to have a means of replacing them.

What else is going to replace stalinism? I think it's worth while saying a few more words about what stalinism actually has done and what the removal of stalinism now leads to. In the first place, it's fairly obvious that because of stalinism we had the Cold War, and the Cold War provided again a means of accumulation. Now, I don't mean the Cold War was just on the side of the US; it was just as much on the side of USSR. But the US knew perfectly well that the USSR was much weaker but preferred to maintain it, to make a whole period in which it could have a particular form of accumulation. Now that of course had come to an end. It is no longer possible to invest in the arms industry in the old way. The arms industry is very important because its prime function lies in the way it can discipline the working class. As long as you have an arms industry it is much easier to control the working class both inside and outside the arms industry. It is possible to argue that there are spies all over has to be fought, people have to work harder, there are spies all over the place, and in the US of course anti-communism played a particular role. As it happens I think the anti-communism in the US had a partial truth. That is to say, it is perfectly true that the USSR was a horrible society and nobody would want to live under it. But what it was serving as was a very important means of control. That's gone. What is going to replace it? What is the disciplinary form of control that is going to replace the Cold War? I don't think there is a form that they can actually use.

Stalinism didn't serve in the Cold War only in a particular economic way. It also served politically and was most important in the post-Cold War period in supporting social democracy. It is no accident that the two are dying together. One can't understand social democracy without understanding the tremendous importance of stalinism for it. I'm not saying that the social democrats before 1917, before there were stalinists, were supported by stalinists or that in the period before the Second World War stalinism was that important. I'm saying in the post war period stalinism was crucial in maintaining the welfare state and social democracy and the forms of concessions that were being introduced by the capitalist class. And in so far as you don't have stalinism in the working class, you don't have the same kind of mass support that could come into existence in order to support the ruling class in this country or in any other country. So one then has to ask exactly how are they going to deal with the situation. I don't know.

If one looks at it politically again the elimination of the Communist Parties is a fantastic gain. It may not look like that in so far as bookshops like Collets are going under and one can't buy marxist books any more, and there are fewer marxist firms that will take marxist publications. But in reality what it means that the kind of suppression of the left that existed for so many years is going or has gone. It's no accident that in this country and in other countries the far left is beginning to show itself in a similar form, in a similar way

or in similar places where the Communist Parties did before.

What does this lead to? The point is that stalinism is no longer there as a means of control, therefore the ruling class no longer has the same form of delay that it did. Or, if you invert it, I don't think there could have been any real change in the world until stalinism had been removed. I don't think there could have been a victory in Spain, or later, by the far left, precisely because Stalin or stalinists did not want it and they had this enormous measure of control. But it's gone. So the capitalist class is now faced with the fact that it's in industrial decline, finance capital as a means of control and as a form of retreat is in trouble, the various forms of delay it had through stalinism are no longer there. What strategy can it actually use today? And that is its real crisis: that it has no strategy. It is a unique crisis, there hasn't been a crisis like this since 1923.

One can put it another way. In terms of the long term downturn, or in terms of the long wave, what we are in is a position where the working class has to be defeated in order for accumulation to proceed. If one actually looks at Trotsky's description of the long wave you can see that he is arguing that it is precisely through the defeat of the working class that the capitalist class has the possibility of extracting extra surplus value. Now to the degree that it does not have that it won't accumulate. In a certain sense, this becomes a subjective phenomenon above the capitalist class: if the capitalist class does not think it will make sufficient profit, it will not invest, and that is where we are. It has to actually defeat the working class under conditions that are no longer as favourable as they were before. It may not appear like that, and most people I encounter seem to be pessimistic, but in my view it is just the opposite. We are in an extremely optimistic position. It may not be that there are enormous numbers; there aren't. There may be very few but that is neither here or there. Let me remind you that the Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD, only had one per cent of the vote in 1878 but by 1890 it was already a major party. So, change can happen very quickly, and I think that is what we must expect.

So the crisis we are in is a unique crisis, it's a crisis in every aspect of capitalist civilisation. It's a crisis of ideology, it's a crisis of politics, it's a crisis of the ruling class, and we've witnessed the way the ruling class cannot hold itself together whether in Japan or this country. The ruling class is now divided; it no longer has a means of keeping itself together. The former means that it used, the Cold War and stalinism, are not there. It hasn't the collectivity it had before, precisely because of the collapse of stalinism. In a certain sense when stalinism came to an end the capitalist class managed to shoot themselves in the foot. I'm not saying that the position today is wonderful; it certainly could be better. But the position is far better objectively than it has been for sixty or seventy years. The crisis is enormous. It's not a terminal crisis: tomorrow we won't have a

socialist society. But it is a crisis from which the capitalist class can not recover as it were. It has no solution.

Harry Cleaver:

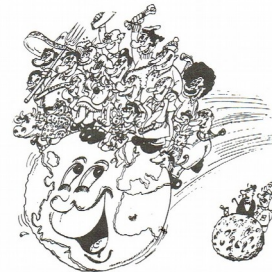
Now you get a different view, at least partially. As there is a certain amount of overlap in the positions that we take, at the same time as there are radical differences, I will try to emphasise the latter more than the former so that we can in fact have something like a debate. I think that Hillel was intuitively correct when he said that there were some fundamental theoretical differences between us. In particular, I would say that his opening comments about there being a difference between the movement of the categories and the movement of the class struggle is a difference. Categories of what? Categories of capital that is, in some sense, different from the class struggle? Not from my point of view. The categories of marxist analysis are the categories of class relations; capital is a class relation - a class relation of struggle. All of the categories of marxist analysis in the three volumes of *Capital* and elsewhere are those of that social relation - which is the class struggle. The only movement of the categories is a movement that occurs as part of the class struggle. There is no other subject as far as I am concerned.

The crisis of capital is a crisis of the class relation. That means that it is a crisis from the point of view of both classes. With respect to capital, Hillel has said some relevant things. But, we also have to recognise that the crisis for capital is simultaneously, in certain ways, a crisis for the working class. The crisis of capital, the manifestations of which began to appear from the early seventies, can be traced to an international cycle of class struggle which ruptured an epoch, a particular organisation of capitalist organisation, of its command. It was epoch making in the sense that we are still in the same crisis. We've gone through business cycles, we've gone through a variety of kinds of changes, but fundamentally the problems that were created in that period of time, the late sixties and early seventies, have not been resolved - nor is there any evidence that they are likely to be resolved in the near future. So, the crisis of capitalism is, first and foremost, once we cut through the fetishism of its categories like money and finance, a failure of old methods of control.

The crisis is profound because it is a crisis of capital's most fundamental mechanism of control: the endless imposition of work. At the heart of the crisis lies the rupture not only of the capitalist productivity deal (higher wages for more work), but also, more generally, the capitalist ability to continue to shape and to subordinate life to work - throughout what some of us call the social factory.

Now the crisis for the working class comes precisely when the old mechanisms of command are abandoned, because workers always struggle about, against and beyond problems that they face, the limitations that work sets on them. When capital counter-attacks, it shifts the ground of the class relationship, and that means a problem of adapting, of figuring out what the hell is going on, of dealing with the new strategies that are mobilised against them. This is what workers have been struggling with for the last twenty years. The counter-attacks have occurred at all levels. They began with the devaluation of the dollar in 1971 and continued through the food and energy crises, changes in the monetary system, increases in the price of oil, restructuring in industry and so on.

In too many ways capital has had a considerable amount of success. Especially in beating down wages and reducing standards of living but also, to some degree, in imposing more work especially in the Third World, but in the First World as well. In the US, workers today are working a twelfth more on the average than they were twenty years ago - an extra month of work per year. That's a substantial defeat any way you look at it. So, at the level of austerity there has been some success and we have had some defeat. Yet, at the level of the reorganisation of class relationships, which is what



is necessary in order to found a new, long wave of accumulation, capital has made much less progress. Some reorganisation of industry and reorganisation of the relationship between the state and the market has been undertaken for some time, but it is not at all clear that it has been successful or that it has laid the foundations for future capitalist development.

The reorganisation of the relation between the state and the market has been a prominent feature of this attempt to create a new (decomposed) set of class relationships. Britain, like the US, has suffered through Thatcherism, Reaganism, the substitution of market mechanisms for certain kinds of government regulations. But this is merely a recomposition. Despite the ideology of vaunting the market against the state, what has been involved has been a recomposition of the relationship between them. Ultimately the market is merely a planning mechanism. It is used when it works (i.e., gives the desired results). It is abandoned when it doesn't work. It is one planning mechanism among others. Market and plan cannot be juxtaposed in the way that they have traditionally been. Understanding the crisis involves seeing through such ideological constructs and reinterpreting them in class terms.

Besides talking about the nature of the crisis, we were also asked to talk about the associated dangers and the opportunities. The dangers are self-evident in the successes that capital has had in making life worse for us, in making our situation more unlivable. The process of decomposition has been undertaken on a world scale, and one of the biggest dangers is not to recognise that it is global and not to deal with it at that level. It isn't enough to talk about it in national terms. The major state institution today is the International Monetary Fund, which has overseen the imposition of the new organisation of capitalist rules at a global level; the deindustrialization of the North is closely connected to the reindustrialization of the South; jobs are not disappearing from industry, they are just being displaced - at least in many industries. In the US, the old industrial belt of the North has become a rust belt and the numbers of Ford auto workers is increasing by the tens of thousands across the border in Mexico. The electronics industry has also moved many of its operations south. Industry hasn't disappeared, it has just been recomposed geographically at the same time as it has been recomposed technologically. At the same time work is being imposed massively, partly in industry, partly outside of industry, throughout the world. The history of the debt crisis of the eighties was exactly the history of that imposition. The IMF assumed a central role as it has gone around the world telling governments and private capital how they have not been doing a proper job in imposing the rules of the game and that they must do so. The state has imposed such changes with austerity and with privatisation, which is to say countries have been opened up to foreign and multinational investment in order to achieve this process of capitalist recomposition (through the decomposition of working class power). This process has been going on at both the micro level and the macro level and we have to respond to both.

In his talk Hillel noted the end of the cold war, the death of the Soviet bogey-man as a means to a permanent arms economy and the social control of the working class, and raised the question of what might replace the Cold War in capitalist strategy. Roughly speaking, I agree with this bit of his analysis. In class terms, the role of the Russian bomb was basically to help the Americans and the West Europeans to keep control and the American bomb helped the Russians do the same thing. Now those threats are no longer there - and in a certain sense they haven't been since the movie, *Dr. Strangelove*, came out, which was after all subtitled, *How to stop worrying and learn to love the bomb*. In the end many realized that the bomb was not really a threat - at least not the generalised threat of annihilation that everybody had been convinced that it was. We had been lied to. We eventually realised that the Americans weren't going to drop thermo-nuclear bombs on the Russians and the

Russians weren't going to drop them on us. Having understood this, we stopped worrying about it, and realized we could fight against racism, the war in Vietnam, and authoritarian schooling because they were not going to drop a nuke on the San Francisco Bay area - it just wasn't going to happen. That whole strategy of fear collapsed as the New Left joined Southeast Asian peasants and took the offensive against capital in the sixties.

Of course, there was an attempt to bring the fear back in the mid-seventies with the discussion of limited nuclear war. Pentagon scenarios were leaked. Ex-NATO General Hackett wrote his novel of World War Three in which Birmingham (England) was nuked by the Soviets while the US took out Minsk. And then the Ukrainians overthrew the Politburo, dismembered the USSR and the war was over. But of course instead of provoking fear and trembling and reintroducing the bomb as an effective weapon of political control, these efforts to launch a second Cold War produced the biggest peace movement in history and deepened the ongoing problems of capitalism.

Well, as Hillel suggests, we certainly should ask what might such a mechanism be replaced? The theoretical answer is that it can only be replaced by the same kinds of mechanism: those that divide us in order to conquer us. Capital rules through divide and conquer. The replacement of one such mechanism by another happens historically and must be appropriate to the level of the crisis of command. One of the characteristics of the struggles that created the current crisis was that it was an international cycle of struggles. It wasn't just the Americans over here and the French over there, and the Italians over there, and the Vietnamese over there, and Che Guevara down in South America. These things were all interlinked. There was an overcoming of international divisions at that period in time as struggles circulated internationally - even the struggles that overthrew the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union had such an international character. Therefore, not surprisingly, we find that one of the fundamental and more obvious aspects of capital's attempt to regain control has been the reintroduction - with a vengeance - of nationalism and racism. The situation in Central Europe is just the most blatant and disturbing example. Nationalism and racism are being wielded to divide and conquer throughout Western Europe, North America and the South as well. Everywhere we find not only extremists preaching hate and carrying out acts of violence, but also moderate politicians adopting an only slightly more subtle form of racism to kindle fear of the enemy within (e.g., the immigrant, the Jew, the minority, the religious other), now that the enemy without (the global communist conspiracy) is gone.

At the heart of the international cycle of struggles which ruptured the old capitalist (and, if you like the term, stalinist) mode of accumulation were those of women, people on the streets, people in their homes, people at school, i.e., those of unwaged workers whose battles circulated into the factories and back again. Fundamental to all of these were the struggles of women. Thus along with nationalism and racism, sexism and the attack on women has also been central to the new capitalist efforts to divide and conquer. The other side of the Reagan attack on the wage and government regulation was the so-called social agenda. That agenda - most of which could not be implemented at the level of government and was pursued instead through private groups such as the religious Right - was aimed squarely at the womb. It was aimed squarely at making women barefoot and pregnant and pushing them back into the house. It is extremely basic to the situation in the States and I warrant elsewhere. If you go to Italy today you see the consequences for women's struggle to gain divorce rights and then abortion rights: plummeting birth rates, reproducing in just a few years the whole earlier pattern of the post war period in Western Europe. The capitalist response has involved importing prostitutes from Africa and increased violence against women. Such are part of the dangers

we face due to new forms of divide and conquer.

The opportunities which are present in the current crisis can only be perceived through understanding our own processes of political recomposition that caused the crisis. If we can understand how the mechanisms of accumulation were ruptured, what were the class forces that ruptured them and how they have been modified by the struggles over the last twenty years then we are in a position to talk about where we go from here. In other words, the only basis for the elaboration of effective working class politics against capital is a proper assessment of our own strengths. One of the problems in Hillel's discussion of the crisis (one he shares with many other marxists) is a tendency to spend most of his time talking about capital as if it were something separate from our relationship to it. We need to talk about us, about how we (the working class both collectively and specifically) created this situation, the degree to which we have suffered setbacks, the degree to which we have avoided defeat and the strength we have to push forward our own demands. Hillel is quite right that this is an epoch-making period of crisis. It really does threaten the continuation of capital, even more so than the situation in the nineteen thirties, for example, which did force a fundamental reorganisation at all levels. But what constitutes the threat?

The content of the struggle that has brought on and maintained this crisis goes to the very heart of the capitalist organisation of life around work, the subordination of society to work. The nature of the struggles that precipitated the crisis, once we understand them, give us an indication of what the alternatives to capital are; and their analysis means that we can abandon a lot of old illusions. On the basis of analyzing the processes of self-valorisation that people are trying to develop, we can reject the old ideas of transition and the old conception of socialism as a homogeneous social project. The struggles that ruptured the system, did not simply break the mechanisms of domination, they also have had a positive content: they were proposing new ways of being and developing projects of new ways of being. I'm thinking here not merely of what workers in cities have done, but what women have done, what the environmentalist movement has done. We need to look at the positive content of these so-called new social movements, to see how they have been trying to create new social relations in the present (the future in the present as Marx said). Those new relations are not out there, and there is no transition to them. They are already being constructed and while the problem for capital is, and always has been, to recuperate, reintegrate and to instrumentalise them, our problem is not only to recognize the emergence of real substantive alternatives to the present order but to facilitate and foster their development. We not only need to be aware of projects like those of women to achieve androgyny, the recomposition of gender relations in society, but we need either to participate in them, or to elaborate other projects and work out the politics of the circulation of struggle across the diversity of such efforts. Now there you have a political project that damn few marxists have been involved in as far as I can see.

The fact that capital counter attacks in new ways, means that we have new opportunities. I don't like the language that Hillel uses about objective conditions, but the fact of the matter is that because European capital is moving toward EEC unity, it is both responding to and forcing a level of international working class collaboration of struggle that we have never seen before. Because the US is pushing the North American Free Trade Agreement to link Canada, the US and Mexico, we are seeing an internationalisation of struggle that has never existed. Today in the US there is a coalition of almost 300 groups fighting against NAFTA - labour groups, women's groups, student groups, environmental groups, all kinds of groups. In Canada there is a similar coalition; in Mexico there is another series of coalitions, and those of all three countries are linked and working closely together. They are connected with computer networks; they are circulating information, at a rate which only capital has been

able to do over the last forty years. Workers are by-passing the old institutions of control, creating a new international fabric of alliances and cooperation.

As marxists we need to draw the implications for politics. What we are seeing is a reconstitution of politics, an abandonment of the old institutions (trade unions and political parties) with which we are so familiar and have often tried to work through, and the problem is to figure how to elaborate new kinds of politics within and among struggles which are diverse and will not be homogenised. The usefulness of the old 'Unite and Fight' slogan is finished. It's useless. To talk about socialism as a homogeneous project is useless. The end of capital is not going to involve, as far as things look at this point, a replacement of one homogeneous system by another homogeneous system. It is going to be more like what Marx evoked in the *Grundrisse*: an explosion, or, as people like Deleuze and Guattari like to say, the emergence of various lines of flight of alternative kinds of social relations and experience. The problem then is that of creating a politics of difference minimising antagonism. It is not a problem which will be solved automatically. Politics, especially new politics, always has to be constructed.

Discussion.

First Speaker: How far do the causes of crises as put forward by Marx in *Capital* contribute to, or account for, the present economic crisis that we're in and why did neither speaker mention any of them?

Harry: I think nobody mentioned them because of lack of time. Marx's theory must be resituated within a historical context; there is considerable complexity in his analysis of various aspects of crisis. Unfortunately, much of the discussion of those theories has been mired in an endlessly useless circle, because for the last fifty years, for the most part, the categories have been taken as fetishised categories. Money has been understood as money; the tendency of the rate of profit to fall has been understood in terms of the monetary rate of profit, etc. Whereas, if you reinterpret these categories as categories of the class relationship then you can see all kinds of things in a new light. For example, take the tendency of the rate of profit to fall - which derives from the tendency of the organic composition of capital to rise. That in turn has to do with the displacement of labour from production. Therefore, the tendency can be re-read in terms of the increasing difficulty of imposing work - which being the most fundamental means of capital's command,



makes it, as Marx said, the most fundamental problem for capital in the long run.

Hillel: I agree with what Harry said to a large degree, but it seems to me that Marx is not saying that there's a simple decline or a sudden collapse or that there is one factor that immediately leads to this. What he is saying is that in a period which leads to a crisis the contradictions in a society reach a point where they can no longer be held. That is the point at which one actually has a crisis. So then one has to look at the different forms of that contradiction: there's the question of the declining rate of profit, there's the question of disproportionality and the third one is one of markets.

The trouble with talking about the declining rate of profit is that it's not that simple. It is not at all clear that one has to argue that there is a simple declining rate of profit and a crash. The same force leading to the rising organic composition of capital leads to a rise in productivity. The result is that it is not at all clear that you get an automatic decline in the rate of profit. So then one is involved in a fairly complex question as to exactly what is going on. It seems to me that what is then involved are the different aspects of the rate of profit. That is to say one then has to talk about the rate of surplus value. One has to talk about the cost of the different elements which go into it.

Now the interpretation of the declining rate of profit is different but I don't see it as an automatic feature. Perhaps we agree - I don't know - but it seems to me you will only get a declining rate of profit if the capitalist class is not able to offset the decline which is occurring for other reasons (largely because the rise in the organic composition of capital, but that again is complicated) by a rise in the rate of surplus value. In other words, if it is not able to cause a decline in the relative wage. In general it is often able to do that through a series of complex forms: taxation; directly attacking the wage; extending the amount of time that people work. So when discussing the declining rate one is discussing not one category but effectively all categories in the end and that is why it is so complex. But it is a crucial category and those are the three aspects. But having said that, what is interesting is not to go over what Marx had to say, but to discuss the present in a more general context. One has to ask why, when one doesn't get that kind of crisis in exactly that form, why isn't it taking place in that form? The answer of course has been that the ruling class has been in a position to have a degree of control which it didn't had before and we haven't had the same sort of sudden slumps as you had before 1944 and for very good reasons. But we are now back in it.

Second Speaker: Both speakers have emphasised the positive aspects of the current period so I just want to throw in a couple of questions. To start with, I disagreed with the last bit of Harry's speech. Socialism is nothing if it cannot become a homogeneous movement. A lot of the movements he talked about are atomised and sectionalised. They are not the new within the old; they are spanners in the works of capitalism. Hillel argued that the splits in ruling classes of various countries are occurring now because they are losing their collectivity. But isn't it also because, with the collapse of the old accommodationist forms of working class representation like social democracy and Stalinism, the ruling class senses that the working class has no collectivity? They feel safer to carry out recomposition in a situation in which the working class actually has no homogeneous collectivity. Harry talked about emergence of regional blocks and the positive side of that in actually internationalising class struggle but neither of the speakers actually mentioned the prospect of a third inter-imperialist war.

Hillel: There is not the same degree of fear of the working class. But I'm not at all certain that the ruling class really regarded the Communist Party as a threat. I think they knew perfectly well they

didn't want to take power. I think they knew perfectly well that in Britain, America, France, Italy or Japan there was no possibility of the working class reaching any degree of threat. So it's true that the limited degree in which the working class did constitute a threat is no longer there, and I'm sure it plays some role. But I think the fundamental aspect which has led to their interecine conflict, is the fact the Cold War having gone, they can no longer find a mechanism for their collectivity. Let's remember that before the Cold War there wasn't the same degree of collectivity as during the Cold War: before 1917, there was the same degree. I think it is no accident that that is so.

You also asked if there would be an inter-imperialist war. I am not a prophet so I don't know. However, I think it is extremely unlikely. I never thought that one side would drop bombs on the other side, I thought that was highly unlikely and I think today that it is equally unlikely that god knows who will drop bombs on anybody else. I don't see who is going to fight who. It's perfectly true that one can imagine minor wars occurring: the Ukraine could fight Russia and I could imagine a few more globally unimportant wars, as it were, but a war between the US and another imperialist power eg., Japan or Germany, seems extremely unlikely. For one reason, if one actually looks at the present day, you still have US control over those two countries. There are still troops in Germany. Japan is still forced to invest in bonds in the US which is losing money. Why on earth is it doing that if it is an independent country? So I find it difficult to imagine an inter-imperialist war at least in the next twenty years.

Harry: I'll respond to two things. First the business of homogeneity. You said socialism is nothing if not homogeneous. I would say socialism has always dreamed of homogeneity but has never gotten it, never will get it; it's not in the nature of the species. So socialism is nothing in a sense, and particularly today. Second, the other issue: the prospect of inter-imperialist war. If by that you mean what Lenin meant by imperialist war (war between competing blocks of capitalists: e.g., WWI, WWII), then I agree with Hillel that it's not likely. However, if you understand inter-imperialist war not in terms of competition for raw materials and capitalist markets or commodity markets but in terms of a political mechanism used for the control of the working class, then the fact of the matter is that we already have war. We have war all over the damn place. Our world is rotten with war and a couple of years ago we just went through a war that is being discussed as paradigmatic of the future of war under capitalism - the damn Gulf War. The fundamental role of the Gulf War was regulating labour relations in the Gulf and at home. The strategy of the US government was to try to use the so-called need to send US troops into the Persian Gulf to break through a whole series of blockages which workers have placed to capitalist development within the US, not least of which is in the field of energy which is not surprising. The Gulf after all, from the US point of view, is nothing but an oil pit, one big gas station which has to be available. So what do they try to do? Workers and people in the US defeated the nuclear energy industry back in the seventies. Capitalist planning was for nuclear power plants to be supplying 60-70% of electricity in the US by the year two thousand, but after 1974 there were no more nukes being built, there were no more nukes being commissioned and most of the ones that were being built were being abandoned. That industry was killed. One of the things that Bush tried to do with the Gulf War was to use it as an excuse to revitalise the nuclear power industry and to open up the north shore of Alaska to oil exploration. Both of which had been blocked by social struggles in the US up until that point - mostly struggles by the peace and environmental movement. As for other wars, we can talk about Yugoslavia, South East Asia, Timor, and elsewhere, Southern Africa and so on. War has always been an integral part of capitalist class relations; its not about to disappear; it will continue.

Third Speaker: Nobody said anything about communism. Communism is a society without wage labour, without commodity production, a world human community. How do we get to communism? The working class has to overthrow capitalism. It has to become autonomous - from all the forces of capital. I don't think it's a debate any more between communists whether stalinism, social democracy and trotskism are part of the working class or not, some form of working class representation. They are part of capital. The system in the so-called Soviet Union was a capitalist system, the Communist Parties were capitalist parties, and the trotskist organisations were capitalist organisations. We don't need trotskism or a new version of trotskism.

There are some basic definitions we need before we can have a debate. Imperialist war wasn't mentioned. The question of imperialist war separates people very clearly. During the Iran-Iraq war, there were some people who called themselves marxists who said we should support one side in that war. But if this is declining capitalism, which I think it is, one of the ways that it survives is through imperialist wars. What happened in 1945 was a period of reconstruction after imperialist war. That period came to an end and we're now in a profound crisis. The war in Yugoslavia is an imperialist war, not just a war between Serbs and Croats. There is already the beginnings of new imperialist alignments. Are you on one side or the other or are you for the working class against all the imperialist powers? That's the real question for revolutionary marxists.

Hillel: I agree with you that the working class has to be separated from stalinists and social democrats. I'd go further and say that it's true that most groups today have a long way to go, whoever they are, including your group. Unfortunately the formation of small grouplets over the whole stalinist period has stalinised all of them. It doesn't matter what they were. It doesn't matter whether they opposed the Russian Revolution in 1917 and regarded it as state capitalist, they all became small stalinised-type grouplets. It's impossible to hold out under these conditions and not be deformed. But we are now in a new period where, hopefully, we will not spend all our time fighting one another and leaving everything to the capitalist class. Under present conditions the previous differences, arising out of stalinism, are no longer so important. As long as people are opposed to capitalism as a whole and are not reformists, it's important that differences should not become once again important reasons for the development of sectarian groups, and gurus. But it seems to me that the last speaker didn't give us any way forward in that regard.

I do agree with the speaker who said that there is only one socialism. And I also agree with the last speaker that we are talking about the working class. I don't think it has been abolished. I think the vast majority of the population do belong to the working class. It is the universal class - I don't think that has changed at all. But the issue, which the last speaker was not facing, was why nothing happened effectively for the last eighty years, sixty years or whatever it is. It's no good just calling Russia state capitalist and saying we got nowhere. Why didn't we succeed? Why are we in small groups? And why are we marginalised? That question has to be asked. And answered. And it seems to me you don't answer it by saying that that awful society that existed, over there in Russia is just the same as what exists over here. In certain respects it was far, far worse. But whatever it was it was not the same, and it played a crucial role in maintaining capitalism itself, precisely because it was not capitalist.

Harry: I just want to respond to part of what was said. Yes, of course, the working class must be autonomous from capital, and it has been, and that is why capital is in so much trouble. The question is: what does it mean to be autonomous from capital and what is the

content of autonomy? Autonomy is not homogeneous. Capital formed the working class, right, and that's the story of primitive accumulation, the formation of the working class. Capital formed a group which from its own point of view was homogeneous and malleable, could be divided and conquered, and moved around and used. Now the struggle against that making, from the beginning and on through all the years of accumulation, involved a rejection of that homogeneity, sometimes a utilisation of it, but ultimately a struggle against being, as Marx put it, mere worker. The traditional marxist vision of socialism - which Hillel seems to share - is a world of workers. Socialism, or communism for that matter, is not understood as a classless society but as a one class society.

But that class is what we want out of. We never wanted into it in the first place, and we want out of it now. But out of it to do what? Out of it to do all kinds of things, not to do one other thing. That's what we mean by domination, the imposition of a single universal order. At least that's what I mean by domination. I can imagine several different kinds of such an order, but the point is that in any form of domination you have the imposition of homogeneity. So, when we talk about autonomy from capital we mean autonomy from homogeneity. It also means we have to recognise the autonomy of different sectors of the class and the struggles of people to get out of their class status. The struggles of women are not the same as the struggles of men; the struggles of blacks are not the same as the struggles of whites. Our problem is the construction of a politics that gives up the illusion that everyone can be talked into agreeing how the world ought to be and, on that basis, unite and fight. That is what the left has been trying to do for the last one hundred years and it has gotten absolutely nowhere. Now you can, as some do, say that the so-called new social movements have nothing to do with the working class. But what do you think the working class is? If you think the working class is just traditional factory proletarians, I'm afraid that that is only a small part of the whole at this point. The working class is not just made up of workers throughout the world

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ON THE THREAT OF WATER PRIVATISATION
IN SCOTLAND (Brian McGrail)

MARXIAN CATEGORIES, THE CRISIS OF CAPITAL
AND THE CONSTITUTION OF SUBJECTIVITY
TODAY (Harry Cleaver)

THE FREEING OF MARX (John Holloway)

ON THE STATE AND INTERNATIONAL MONEY
(Peter Burnham)

A REPLY TO HOLLOWAY'S OPEN MARXISM,
HISTORY & CLASS STRUGGLE (Heidi Gerstenberger)

BOOK REVIEWS: Linebaugh's *The London Hanged* (Ian Fraser); *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War 1973-92* (Andy Watson); *Sabotage in the American Workplace* (Paul Barrett and Alan Rice) and *Niethammer's Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?* (Adrian Wilding)

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who are busy producing commodities. It includes all of those people who are busy producing what is the most fundamental commodity of all: labour power. Such producers include women in the home and students in schools and a vast number of other people. That's the reason why the working class continues to make up the vast majority of the population. All of those people are struggling from different positions in the class structure and they are struggling for different things. Now if you don't develop a politics that recognises and appreciates that autonomy among the people opposing capital then you'll just go on in this room talking to each other for ever.

Fourth Speaker: I want to follow on from what Harry has just said. I think the problem we're faced with is that the left is stuck in a nineteenth century paradigm and this is partly due to the experience of stalinism. The whole approach to the centrality of the workplace and trade unions, and an approach to, and a model of, revolution that hasn't progressed anywhere beyond 1917, shows how far out of step the left is with the way in which capital has developed in the past seventy years and how that development has remade the working class. Working class experience is far broader than just the experience of the factory or the office or the workplace. In moving beyond a concern solely with workplace struggle, and beginning to take on other areas of struggle, I think we actually begin to develop the whole process of struggle and an attitude to class struggle that is actually far closer to the totality of working class experience. That has to be important if we want to move towards a communist society. But I think there is a problem in the way Harry has been putting it forward. While it is important to move into a whole multiplicity of arenas that the left has never considered as part of the struggle for communism, I think that if you start denying any possibility of leading or totalising those struggles, you leave those struggle in the hands of the petty bourgeois careerist politicians. If you look at who's dominated the women's movement, anti-racist work, the gay movement, it hasn't been working class activists, it has been middle class activists imposing their values on people in struggle. The question I really want to pose is: what, if any, role is there for the revolutionary party in the struggle for communism?

Harry: I am not opposed by any means to linking struggles. A fundamental concept in the work I do is the notion of the circulation of struggle. Instead of talking about uniting and fighting through ideological methods, it means building concrete linkages between struggles. In the sixties, the students in the US and the Vietnamese peasants in the rice fields were not linked in a party, but struggle circulated across the Pacific and caused enormous problems for capital and ultimately, its breakdown. The struggles of women are not often united with the struggles of men in a party or in any unified institution, yet it is quite clear that their struggles have circulated and profoundly affected the activities of men and the politics of men. The problem of politics is the problem of the circulation of struggle and the organisation of the circulation of struggle. When I reject the party, and I do in the traditional sense, it is not a rejection of organisation, it is simply the rejection of a particular form of organisation which was maybe appropriate to the skilled workers at the turn of the century but is certainly inappropriate to workers today. Our problem is to discover the way these connections are being established today. It's not done through a party; it's not done through a centralised organisation; yet the circulation of struggle is extremely rapid, the speed of optical fibre.

Hillel: It's impossible to discuss the party in one minute. In my view we certainly can't do without a party. I think we're going to have to have a much firmer party. If we look the way that things are developing I think one has to consider not just the importance of democracy in a party, which is very important, and different centres of influence in a party, which I think is extremely important, but the

fact that a party is a fighting party. The ruling class is not just going to go away. They may be fighting one another but when the working class does become a danger the ruling class will stick together. How do you then deal with it? You can't go around saying I'm opposed to it, or linking up all over the place. When it is fighting you and putting you in gaol, you are in gaol. You have to find a way around it. You have to then go underground if necessary. Now the exact form of the party, the exact form the working class will take in the course of struggle, I don't know. It will come into being. Just as the soviet was the particular form that took place in Russia, so here in the West or wherever there will be another form. I don't know the form, but it will come into being and there will have to be a party or perhaps a number of parties, but there is no other way around it. I don't know any other way of overthrowing a ruling class.

Fifth Speaker: It's a bit dangerous to say capitalism doesn't have any strategy after stalinism. The threat of proletarian revolution occurs because of inter-imperialist conflict. Therefore, when capitalism is devising a strategy to oppose proletarian revolution, it cannot allow inter-imperialist antagonism to lead to inter-imperialist war. Therefore the strategy that is being developed by the capitalist powers to prevent the proletarian revolution is that of ultra-imperialism. Marxists have been blinkered about looking at the question of ultra-imperialism because at one time it was associated with Karl Kautsky. But the major imperialist nations are getting together to offload the crisis of capitalism in terms of war, a joint offensive against the international working class. In trying to divide the working class, the capitalist powers are developing this strategy of ultra-imperialism and therefore the question of internationalism is linked to anti-imperialism. That is how they are trying to redevelop their ideological cohesion after the fall of stalinism. If one strategy, for various reasons, becomes defunct, then obviously new political strategies have to be developed. I think the real problem in what Hillel Ticktin argued is that of objectivism, fatalism, saying: after stalinism, it's our turn. That minimises question of the seventy years of the culture of defeat the working class has had that has created fatalism and defeatism within the working class itself.

Hillel: In terms of what you said, that is not much of a strategy. It's a strategy for chaos. To fight Saddam Hussein a hundred times over doesn't get anywhere. I don't think it's dividing anybody and it's not establishing any form of control. All it is, is a tragic comedy or a comic tragedy, but it is not a means of control. It doesn't compare to the Cold War or the previous forms. None of these small wars are achieving this object. One can see this by the results of ten days ago when Clinton bombed Iraq. What was the result? Did he achieve very much? Did he achieve anything except more criticism of himself? He achieved very little, so I can't see that that is much of a strategy. So, if you are going to ask: is the strategy a nationalist strategy, dividing people on a nationalist basis, and is it a form of imperialist division results, now this is true. Quite obviously there are national differences which are being played on; that is absolutely correct. However, one has to ask how long people are going to go along with that. I don't think Yugoslavia is any example. It is the result of the decay of stalinist forms. It may be that capitalist powers got involved, but even if they didn't it would still have occurred and it's got to do with stalinism and not with capitalism as itself, so that is not an example of nationalism. But for capitalism, nationalism in general is of course crucial and Harry has mentioned it. The problem is that it has obviously failed. Has it worked in Africa where the standard of living is below that which it was under the colonial overlords? Clearly it hasn't worked. How long do people need to be told that it doesn't work? I don't think that it's that long. That isn't a strategy, and if you are talking about imperialism, that is what is actually involved, let's say binding together the whole population

on a nationalist basis. My answer, therefore, is that it cannot work, they don't have a strategy. It may work for one or two years. But that's all.

Harry: I just have a couple of things to say. Just because a strategy fails does not mean there is no strategy; to say that there are limits to what has been achieved so far through the use of the Gulf War is not to say that nothing was intended and nothing was accomplished. The fact of the matter is that there has been a militarisation of the oil fields of the Gulf and around the rest of the world. The message went to Nigeria and to a lot of other places. The uprising in Caracas and Venezuela mirrored that of the Gulf. That militarisation has made the struggles of people in those areas extremely difficult. The Palestinians are suffering the consequences, but they are not alone. The Iraqi working class is suffering the consequences. The fact of the matter is that in the Gulf War Bush was responsible for the killing of Saddam Hussein's opposition. You will remember the Revolutionary Guards were pulled back from the front in Kuwait and they were not wiped out. In a very real material sense the Gulf War left Saddam Hussein in better control internally than he was before, that was the result, and I would argue that there was a strategy to use the war to regain control over the working class. In the US the war was being used to rationalise all sorts of attacks on the working class. The fact that they haven't always succeeded doesn't mean it wasn't a strategy.

The second thing concerns nationalism and racism. To say nationalism and racism have failed in Africa is a statement I just don't understand. The racism in South Africa, the rupture of that racism, or apartheid, through the struggles of the black working class in South Africa has been an integral part of the crisis of capital. That racism functioned for a very long time in the context of the global accumulation of capital to make possible the existence of a monetary system of a certain sort (based in part on gold) and the extraction of vast quantities of surplus value. You don't measure the efficacy of a capitalist strategy by whether or not the workers are well off in a particular area of the world, for God's sake, or whether constant capital is accumulated in a particular place. Imperialism is the differential accumulation of constant and human capital and an intentional hierarchy of income. When you get right down to it that is what marxist analysis is about: accumulation is always uneven. The IMF imposition of austerity in Africa facilitates the extraction of surplus value everywhere. The surplus value produced in Africa is being transferred through international pricing, transferred through

the manipulation of money and commodity prices out of Africa, like it always has been.

Sixth Speaker: What is socialism?

Harry: What do I mean by the time for socialism is gone and how else are you going to relieve the problems of war and poverty for humanity? I don't mean that we abandon the struggle against capitalism and that we abandon the struggle to create a new world by any means. I mean that the concept of socialism has been ambiguous in a lot of ways. Ultimately the problem with it was that it posed the idea of replacing one kind of homogeneous society by another homogeneous society. That's the project which it seems to me is gone, or it should be gone. I also know it's not gone for a lot of people; they are hell bent on doing it. But they are not going to succeed because it's irrelevant at this point in history. The class struggle has moved way beyond that. It may be that it was a sustainable illusion for a certain period of time, but I do not think that it is sustainable in this period of time. That's what I mean by the time for socialism is gone - not that we don't have to replace capitalism, not that we're not to design social alternatives - but that the old models that are still being clung to are obstacles to the social processes which most likely to contribute to the actual transcendence of capitalism.

Hillel: I was asked to define socialism. I define it as a society where creative labour becomes mankind's prime want - the way it is defined by Marx. Everything else follows from that and it gets away from the question of income and a few other things. Obviously in a socialist society you do not have a law of value. It is planned, and planning involves the conscious regulation by the economy and society by the direct producers. There is total democracy if you want to call it that.

You also made the point, that I completely fail to understand, about the present epoch in terms of Iraq or South Africa or god knows where. There are wars all over the place. Of course there are wars all over the place. But that is not the same as before. The question is: are these wars all over the place, these different forms, meant to work in the same way as before, with the same degree of efficiency as before? Are they going to control the working class in the same way? That is the question. When capitalist powers are going into Iraq, does it mean that the crisis in capitalism is reduced, ameliorated, or removed?

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The leopard in the 20th century

value, struggle and administration

An examination of the changes within capitalism as a response to the development of the antagonistic class. By William Dixon

Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è bisogna che tutto cambi (If we want everything to stay as it is, everything has to change), The Leopard, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa.

Capitalism is a combination of both subjective and objective factors. In terms of the objective, capitalism is a system that operates through certain real categories, for example the opposition of use value and exchange value. From an analysis of such categories we may draw some conclusions regarding the tendency of the system. These in turn may appear then as expressing the laws of the system. As a specific and distinctive historical system capitalism does have objective characteristics; it is not feudalism, it is not primitive communism, it has its own forms. The surplus is appropriated as surplus value. We could now leave the analysis there and so reproduce all the worst aspects of 'scientific' marxism. Capitalism would then be seen as moving through objective laws. It would appear in this light as a naturalised system. Too much of marxism has appeared to endorse this approach. For example we are led to believe in a set of objective conditions that mature when, hey presto! - crisis! And the working class is woken up. Other than this the working class has no role to play. The subjective appears to have no historical presence until the final moment. The development of capital is seen as proceeding according to its own laws and through the interrelation of capitals.

The alternative view to this is to stress the struggle of the working class. This has been particularly characteristic of the anarchists but they have had no monopoly. This view has been necessary because of the previous orthodoxy of marxism. It fails though to consider adequately not just the categories through which struggle must move but also how the struggle leads to development of the categories and hence new conditions of struggle.

We need to develop an understanding of capital as embodying both objective and subjective aspects. As capitalism develops so the subjective aspect becomes more important, indeed decisive. This is an objective aspect of a system that cannot help but develop through the development of the division of labour and hence the creation of social labour as a global, truly social phenomenon.

The conception of 'partial suspensions of the law of value' is central to a thesis that attempts to understand the political economy of the twentieth century as the interaction of the subjective and objective. The formation of the working class and its political development are taken into account as well as modifications in bourgeois society by which the threat was contained. In this sense

partial suspensions of the law of value are located at the heart of a twentieth century political economy that has been characterised by both the appearance of the revolutionary proletariat and also by regimes that have successfully disorganised that threat. Capital has no natural laws but it is a system that is constrained to change only in specific ways, through the categories and their modifications, of the law of value.

The view that explains twentieth century political economy on the basis of partial suspensions of the law of value contests what have been the orthodox right and left views that the USSR was a communist experiment and the welfare states represented an advance of the working class. In this view the significance of the Eastern European events of 1989 is that they mark an important milestone in the disintegration of anti-working class regimes. Similarly, the success of right wing free market projects in the West are indicative of a profound crisis in left wing political groups that have failed to represent the actual movement of the working class. In short the significant failure of the late twentieth century has been of regimes concocted on the basis of the prevention of communism, especially bureaucratic, often murderous, administrative regimes. The virtually wholesale implication of the left in these regimes has aided the disorganisation of working class responses to the fantastic opportunities of this period.

It is politically necessary to retrieve the communist perspective, to draw a sharp line through the left on this basis. If this is to avoid any sectarian assertion of purity, the insecure reliance on dogma, it is necessary to reclaim theory as the specific prerogative of the working class and communism as the heart of the movement. It is necessary to lay claim to a perspective that is confident that humanity's development, while proceeding through the productive forces, cannot establish its creative reason short of communism. Only then can the real creative individuality of our species be realised. Only then will individual development be freed from the external limits of money and administration. Only then can individual development be truly social.

The point now is to establish the communist perspective without apology and without compromise. The reclaiming of theory as the description of the real movement, the chronic tendency to communism, is necessary in order not just to orient practice, but also to disrupt and affront a left that has been complicit in the prevention of communism. This task can only be achieved if the retrieval of the communist perspective is insistent that it speaks of the development of humanity, the self-creation of the historic subject, only then will

the arrogant banality of so much of the left be shown up.

It is necessary in the retrieval of the communist perspective to grasp the political economy of bourgeois society as it has developed in the twentieth century. So much of this period has been claimed uncritically as representing working class progress. This progress must be reassessed from the perspective of communism. The possibility of such an appraisal is not intellectual; it is real development that makes theory possible and necessary. The rude fact smarting on the face of the old ideologists is that the previous regimes broke down not only without working class support but actually under the impact of working class opposition or resistance. After the breakdown of all this progress, all those limiting forms, reality leaves us no choice but communism.

In this article I will outline the phenomena from which the conception of partial suspensions of the law of value arose. After this I will explain briefly the view of the law of value from which it is then possible to explain partial suspensions. When this is done I will explain why this is a fruitful analysis by outlining the various facts, experiences, problems it can take account of within a theoretical framework that has an essentially simple core.

Grasping Politicised Facts

In this article I refer to 'we'. This includes several different people. They had in common that they were ex-members of different political segments aware of the limitation of their own background, not desperate to leap into another segment, not looking for position, but needing to evolve etc. Although the first article on the prevention of communism was by Binns and Dixon (*Radical Chains* 1) there were several other voices hidden in that text.

We had in common the need to reach an understanding of the present situation. While each would hold to the contribution they could make from their respective backgrounds there was no desire for a merely eclectic adding on of bits from different traditions. We all recognised that the common theory we sought would have to have its own basic simplicity from which eventually we could critique the different traditions from which we arose. We shared the recognition that there was a need for a theory and not for an agglomeration of ideas.

An immediate motivation was to make sense of the sorry state of the left in relation to the current development of bourgeois society. We shared the conviction, based on experience, that the left had lost contact with any communist perspective, irrespective of its marxist variant. This was reflected in its splintering into mutual antagonisms, Trotskyist, Left Communist, Autonomist, Leninist, etc. Each knew what was wrong with the other but remained studiously attached to its own limitations. The problem to be addressed was certainly not the success of the right (which still needed to be studied) but rather the horrendous failure of the left. In this light there was little to be gained through adopting one strand with militant fury and then blaming the rest of the left from that position. Sectarianism is thus multiple correctness.

Our initial focus was on the twentieth century success of social democracy in the West while in the East and 'Third World' there was the political power of what we and others before us identified as Stalinism. These phenomena we regarded as something more than merely political entities. While clearly, indeed murderously, on the side of capitalist survival, they could not easily be dismissed as capitalist in essence, anymore than they could be claimed as wonderful victories for the working class, or as forms transitional to anything but hell.

It appeared on both sides, East and West, that communism had been blocked and that the social forms that had evolved depended for their existence on this blockage. Furthermore the left was centrally involved in the blockage. In fact several forms of socialist organisation had developed, at best, ambiguous relations to the

working class. It was clear that the left was actually a central element of the prevention of communism.

Our initial critical perspective towards the left allowed us to make sense of a split between class struggle and many of the forms of the labour movement i.e. CPs, Social Democratic Parties, trade unions etc. There were clearly struggles that had of necessity developed autonomy from the usual representative forms. At the same time these were struggles that showed up the limiting function of the welfare state. In fact a critical perspective to these forms would have been meaningless if there had not been social movement outside and against them. The critique of these forms already had a social expression.

There are never straightforward facts. It was our specific concerns as political activists able to share different experiences and perspectives that lead to the particular grasp of the problem to be confronted. The facts themselves were politicised. We needed to understand the blockage of the movement to communism and the development of highly dubious, indeed repressive, social forms supported by many parts of the left. The experience of these facts was not only common enough amongst many activists but they were perceivable because of the repeated opposition of apparent working class forms to actual working class struggles.

Our initial attempt to grasp these facts was the thought that the relation between the socialistic forms and the blockage of communism could not be accidental but was rather a necessary connection. We came to regard these forms as not transitional to communism but as necessary forms of the prevention of communism. Although the epoch as a whole may be transitional we regarded the prevention of communism as an inevitable institutional form within this transition. Clearly this required a questioning of the concept of transition. We were inclined to sympathy with a discontinuous conception, closer to that theorised by Pannekoek rather than what we considered the misleading continuity in transition of Trotsky. This latter conception tended to ascribe some virtues to forms inimical to the working class. In fact with the appearance of the proletariat as historical subject at the end of the nineteenth century, beginning of the twentieth century, working class 'advances' had become the condition for the survival of bourgeois society. Transition was marked by the requirement that bourgeois strategy should speak a language of subordination to the working class but essentially should still act as a discipline over it.

We took it as self evident that planning could only be the rational activity undertaken by a subject with its needs and capacities joined in a social process. In other words for humanity the only possibility



SERGIO NAVARERO. Acknowledgements to Latin American Bureau

of planning would be the formation of the working class as universal class, as the social power with no limitation by external mediation. It was obvious that no such process took place in the Soviet Union. The pretensions of the socialist elites did not disturb us, for the claim to planning by such elites and bureaucrats could never be sufficient evidence that planning was taking place.

Our conception of communism allowed us to view the socialist forms as quite distinct from planning, as administrative processes that had supplanted the functions of the money system but in which the social discipline of the collective was not established. It was clear that the socialisms defeated in West or East had never been victories of the working class anymore than they were victories of the bourgeoisie. Talk of victory and defeat may be suitable to those who still viewed class struggle as if it were a team sport but for the evaluation of a social process it could tell us nothing. We can see that the bourgeois survive so in this limited political sense the bourgeoisie have won, but then they will always 'win' until the social system is overturned. Rather than victories or defeats moving us backwards and forwards, to and fro, in a linear nightmare we aimed to identify real transformations in political economy. The conditions of accumulation and control over the surplus had changed in anticipation and prevention of communism.

It was inevitable that the development of proletarian potential would provoke measures to forestall it. Where the working class had developed these measures could not be crudely repressive but would have to be couched in terms of a formal recognition of the needs of the working class. The survival of the bourgeoisie required the opening of a political channel to the working-class but of course never for any other reason than intervention into the process of class formation.

Since at least the 1880s bourgeois survival has had to be couched in terms of a working class project, or rather, a project on behalf of the working class. They were all socialists then, magnanimously admitting to their socialist sympathies whilst coming up with their 'practicable' schemes for respectable working class improvement.

For communists this social progress has to be reconciled within a theoretical framework that grasped it also as the prevention of communism. The question then was not an quantitative one concerning how much better peoples' lives were, but a theoretical one of uncovering in what essential ways the system had changed. According to this criteria the crucial change to understand lay in the orientation of the system to needs and the limits of this change.

The theoretical explanation for the problems outlined here, what I may term politicised facts, came out of an understanding of the operation of the law of value. Indeed it had to. We followed Marx in identifying the law of value as the central mechanism and social form of capitalism. The surplus was, peculiarly to capital, extracted in the form of value. The social dominance of exchange value marked the social dominance of capital itself. All previous social forms had forms of power, dominance etc. The problem that had to be addressed was the fate of the capitalist form; this meant the fate of the law of value.

It is possible to identify the dominant tendency of the system at different times. In the period of capital's ascendancy the tendency was to assert the rule of the law of value, that is to clear away all obstacles and modifications. In essence this rule was the subordination of need to exchange. We can see it extolled and recommended in the works of Smith and Ricardo. These formed the theoretical basis for the movement of reform that allowed and expressed the social rule of money, become capital. It is in this period, from late eighteenth century to mid-nineteenth century, that we see the height of the movement to supplant the aristocratic and mercantile control through state structures. The prospective achievement of the law of value, that is to say, the domination of need by exchange, was not considered in any way a threat to the system but as its completion and triumph. Although never achieved with a textbook purity, the



law of value was the essential element of the maturing system.

It was on the basis of this system, in this period, that Marx developed his critique of political economy. This included his identification, in the first chapters of *Das Kapital*, of the nature of exchange value and use value, abstract and concrete labour. He certainly did not waste his time by presenting acres of exceptions and departures from some ideal development; such a presentation would have negated the scientific purpose of his work. He showed the system of domination of needs by exchange to be inseparable from the social organisation of production for value and hence the inseparability of exchange from value production. This is especially true when our viewpoint starts from the necessity of transcendence of value by production for need.

The Operation of the Law of Value

The argument is that partial suspensions of this law of value have been characteristic of the twentieth century. We need to be sure that we are dealing with real change. The crux of the change can be seen, empirically, in the growth of administration but the essential element of this is the changing orientation of the system to needs. This change can be identified as a change in the operation of the law of value. To grasp this we must be clear about the essential operation of the law of value. We can then go on to specify what it means in terms of the social orientation to needs.

The law of value is the mediation, distribution, of social labour through exchange value. Through the tendency for products to exchange as equivalents, different concrete labours are equated. In this exchange their common characteristic of being abstract human labour is asserted. They are then, in this act of exchange, socially validated as containing some quantity of socially necessary labour. It is characteristic of capital that the social validation requires this act of exchange and that it occurs after the fact of production. Only in the act of exchange is abstract labour socially constituted as such because only in this act are different concrete labours brought into a relation of equality to each other. Without this act the sharing of some common characteristic, abstract labour, has no social or logical meaning. The possibility of equating different concrete labours is not merely an idea nor can it be established by decree. It can only, and must, be established in the exchange of the products themselves. The equality is made real by the exchange and only then can it be discovered by the investigator.

The law of value may appear as a functional process, a system of distribution of social labours. Indeed it is necessary that it does achieve a regulatory function. From this we may go on to conclude that the act of exchange is the social relation itself. Of course it is not. Although exchange is necessary for the existence of abstract labour it is not in itself sufficient. Exchange has existed for thousands of years without human labours being systematically reduced to abstract labour. The existence of exchange is not the same as its social dominance. Where it acts only in the interstices of society abstract labour cannot be said to have come into being. In such a society the majority of products are made for use even if under coercion. For the law of value to be the social form labour must be subject to its disciplines, that is to say to the requirements of successful exchange. The existence of exchange only indicates this potential; this is not the same as realisation.

Where the law of value pervades society then necessarily ex-

change value, hence money, must be dominant. If exchange is universal then there must be the universal equivalent. For this to have occurred specific social conditions must have come into being. The essential condition is the sale of labour power. This requires the separation of the labourer from the means of production. It is in this separation that we can see the social relation necessary to the law of value. It is only with this separation that labour is thrown by necessity into the world of exchange, that labour capacity itself becomes an exchange value. So it can only be on this basis, the commodification of labour power, that the law of value can become the social regulator of labour. In this circumstance the law of value is the form of relation of labour to itself. It is the social existence of the working class as labour power.

In the absence of the separation of labour from the means of production, the absence of labour power as a commodity, the law of value cannot develop adequately as a social form. There can still exist production for use, whether in coercive or co-operative form; in either case concrete labours are not equated through exchange and hence abstract labour is not established. We find then that abstract labour has another condition as necessary as exchange itself, that is absolute poverty. This condition is not accidental but is the other side to the formation of abstract labour. In the separation of labour from the means of production labour is abstracted; it is torn apart from all its specific concrete abilities. In this moment it exists as abstract labour but not yet in the process of social validation, though needing this validation as a matter of life or death. It exists to the extent that it is impelled to enter exchange. As the condition of value production, absolute poverty is the separation of labour from all means of production including itself; it is the required atomisation over which value is the necessary mediation.

What has been described here is the social relation of money representing the social wealth confronting labour as poverty. We are in the topsy-turvy world of capital. It should be obvious to anyone that in this world as described here the existence of abstract labour, the operation of the law of value as regulator, is inseparable from the necessity for the state. It is the organised form by which the separation of labour and means of production is ensured. It is the guarantor of the absolute poverty of the working class. The only fair play it knows is the abstraction of labour. The essential use value for capital and the use value without which there is no capital relation is labour capacity itself. This is the immediate source of value. This capacity is peculiar in that its production as use value is not a simple result of concrete labour. Its existence as use value must be established through the state. The most important commodity is produced by this 'invisible' hand of production.

In its cohesion and unitary power over society the state guards the atomised existence of the working class. It guarantees the everyday normalcy of the mediation of the law of value. It ensures, with all its compassion, that the need for the social existence of the law of value is a genuine need. Through its laws and regulations and police this social existence is established as ordinary and as contractual between equivalent citizens.

For its essential operation then the law of value requires the absolute poverty of the worker. This is necessary if exchange is to be able to equate different concrete labours in terms of abstract labour. In brief then, for the worker, to live means to work for the wage. At the centre of this social form is the complete subordination of needs to money mediation. It is because of this that we can identify the law of value as not merely a distributive mechanism but as the social existence of the working class. The law of value does not stand apart from the working class as a separate mechanism; it would be more purposeful to say that the law of value is the existence of the working class standing apart from itself. Needs and capacities are torn apart. Capital itself is the seizure of the collective power as production of value. As such it is a regime over needs, the mediated absence of subjectivity.

The atomisation of the working class is crucial to the operation of the law of value just as the law of value is necessary for the atomised working class. In this form of the working class we can see the full operation of commodity fetishism in which social relations take the form of relations between things. This is described of course in the first chapters of Marx's *Das Kapital*. I shall return to this later.

Bourgeois Reform: Absolute Poverty and the Unified Wage.

From the point of view of capitalist reform appropriate state structures must be achieved for the full operation of the law of value. I have already mentioned the defence of private property; this is obvious enough. The other side of this is the regulation of the poverty of the working class. In concrete terms this would take the form, in the first half of the nineteenth century, of a debate over the poor laws and the poverty composition of the working class. This in turn would become a real political struggle between bourgeois and landlord interests. At the pivot of this struggle was the relation to the working class.

This was the period of bourgeois reform as it pushed towards the democratic state against aristocratic influence. Along with the move to free trade, the abolition of the corn laws and constitutional reform there was also the tendency towards the abolition of the old poor laws. In the works of Ricardo and his many correspondents there is a shared belief in the necessity for the abolition of the Poor Law. This abolition was part of the completion of bourgeois political economy. It would be the expression and realisation of the full sway of capital over all social forms. It meant the end of the

paternalist influence of the old poor laws, the local rates, and the creation of the fully unified wage, the independent labourer. Under the old Poor Law, workers subsistence still required payments from the parish rates, payments that helped foster the dependence of workers on the local administrators, the gentry. For those representing the new political economy the ideal, set against this feudal influence, was the subsumption of the worker to the free realm of contracts; the independence of the worker mediated socially through money.

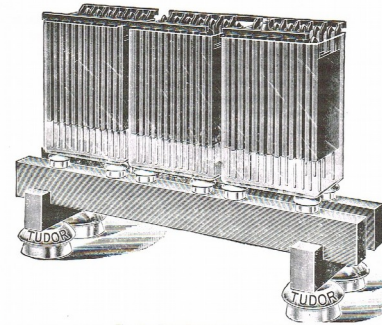


Fig. 318.—Tudor Elements in Glass Boxes

The centrality of the unified wage as a distinguishing characteristic of the political economy is derived from its significance in the creation of a regime over human needs. The unified wage is a particular form of domination over needs; there are other forms but this is the specifically capitalist form in which needs are fully subordinated to exchange value, to money. As capital pushes towards the unified wage so it pushes towards the full naturalisation of its own political economy and the achievement of commodity fetishism.

In this early period there was an extraordinary effort to ensure the education of the working classes to the political economy. Benevolent institutions such as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge sponsored ideas that put the independent labourer at the centre of life for the working class. In this figure the working class were expected to identify the dignity of their own atomism. As one scholar has usefully described these educative efforts they were a 'campaign of containment' (R. Gilmour, *Victorian Studies*, Vol II, Dec 1967). This is true, but not complete, the essence of the message was that working class needs could not be met through collective action but rather through the dignified, self-reliant, independent channel of work. All needs were to be subordinated to money. This same point was put with delightful simplicity by the authors of the Poor Law Report of 1834. In clearly defining the limits to relief they stated that, "It has never been deemed expedient that the provision should extend to the relief of poverty; that is, the state of one who, in order to obtain a mere subsistence, is forced to have recourse to labour." (*Poor Law Report of 1834*, Penguin 1974). Freedom has never been so efficiently described.

In the matter of the poor laws Ricardo and his supporters had prepared the way for their abolition through the setting up of trustee savings banks that would enable workers to save from their wage and then in subsequent periods of need receive back funds for survival. In this way the principle of the unified wage would be asserted whilst practical measures to deal with periods of stagnation of trade were put in place. Despite this initial tendency the actual reform of the poor law did not go as far as some of these political economists had hoped.

The new Act of 1834 still allowed for the provision of relief; but there was nevertheless little doubting the real tendency and aim of the legislation, to put an end to dependence and to form independent labourers. In this respect it marked a break from aristocratic, feudal paternalism. Senior, the principal author of the new Act defended it when he said that previously, "...a large portion of the labourers of England were treated not as freemen but as slaves or domestic animals, and received not strictly speaking wages, regulated by the value of their labour, but rations apportioned to their supposed wants..." (Senior, *The Report Of the Handloom Weavers*). The unified wage could in these circumstances be regarded as a gain for the working class; it was also though a declaration of the absolute poverty of the working class, the full subordination of needs to the progress of accumulation. It announced the end of particular and personal dependence and a new world of universalised and democratic dependence. The legislation sought the perfection of universal poverty as the condition of the necessity to work, against the pauperizing dependence of the previous operation of the poor law. Workers would be fully committed to the accumulation from which there arose the demand for their labour. The actual act instituted a punitive system of administration over relief that would deter the able-bodied from pauperization. It deliberately preserved pauperism as an exclusion from society, as the administrative simulacra of starvation. The unified wage remained the central paradigm of this period. It was the centre of the educative measures of political economy; it outlined a self-reliant path for improvement by the working class.

In the first half of the nineteenth century the movement of reform is towards the unification of the wage, the abolition of that part of



Fig. 65.—Concentric Wall Plugs

the wage received as parish relief. In legislation the Poor Law Amendment Act went much of the way to achieving this paradigm and some way towards the creation of the independent labourer. This period may be identified as the high point of the law of value. However, as the aspiration of bourgeois political economy, the unified wage of absolute poverty would begin to be modified under the impact of the developing formation of the working class.

As is clear to anyone reading the first chapters of *Das Kapital*, commodity fetishism is understood as resting on specific social conditions. "As the foregoing analysis has already demonstrated, this fetishism of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them. Objects of utility become commodities only because they are the products of the labour of all these private individuals who work independently of each other ... Since the producers do not come into social contact until they exchange the products of their labour, the specific social characteristics of their private labours appear only within this exchange." (Marx, *Capital*, vol I p.165, Penguin). The condition of the mediation by exchange is the independence of the producers, their atomisation. This is no psychological, philosophical, or subjective phenomenon. This is a real social condition but it is precisely because of this that it is subject to real social movements. This atomism is the atomism of social labour. This is its separation from itself in absolute poverty. Commodity fetishism is not then a phenomenon that crumbles under the weight of superior persuasion but does so under the action of the working class itself. The formation of the class cannot help but undermine the social condition of commodity fetishism. It brings forward the practical possibility of social labour. This in turn opens the catch-up space for intellectuals to understand the social phenomena.

There is no exterior force but a real development within capital that changes its own conditions of consciousness. The necessary struggle over wages etc creates the conditions in which workers see through the operation of the law of value. This is no philosophical discovery but is a practical result of and in turn condition for the process of class formation. Indeed to describe it as 'seeing through' is in itself misleading. It would be more accurate to say that from the struggle itself conditions develop for grasping new potentials. This involves an element of 'seeing through'. In this sense class solidarity, necessarily antagonistic, has also to be theory.

True, there continues on the surface of society the exchange of equivalents but in the struggle itself it is revealed that this exchange is far from being the basis of production. Here in the core of society there is discovered a basis beneath the "semblance of exchange". "This exchange of equivalents proceeds; it is only the surface layer of a production which rests on the appropriation of alien labour without exchange, but with the semblance of exchange ... there is no longer any ground for astonishment that the system of exchange values—exchange of equivalents measured through labour—turns into, or rather reveals as its hidden background, the appropriation of alien labour without exchange, complete separation of labour and property." (Marx *Grundrisse* p.509)

The revelation of the hidden background is generated within the system itself as part of its own development. The crucial point is the recognition by workers of the wage as a proportion of the product. The political economists would present the wage as received in

exchange for a specific use value, as an exchange of equivalents but: "As correct as this is in one regard, it also introduces the apparent form of barter, of exchange, so that when competition permits the worker to bargain and to argue with the capitalists, he measures his demands against the capitalists' profit and demands a certain share of the surplus value created by him; so that the proportion itself becomes a real moment of economic life itself. Further, in the struggle between the classes - which necessarily arises with the development of the working class - the measurement of the distance between them, which, precisely, is expressed by wages itself as a proportion, becomes decisively important. The semblance of exchange vanishes in the course of the mode of production founded on capital." (*Grundrisse* p.597). The crucial element in the process outlined here by Marx is the development of working class organisation. The necessity for it denies exchange as the real basis of the relation in production and forms the basis for grasping new principles of social organisation. Marx understood commodity fetishism as being undermined within the course of capitalist development.

The division of labour mediated by exchange, production for exchange i.e. production of value, generates the social condition for the creation of labour as a self-formed subject and so production for use. The social conditions necessary to, indeed intrinsically part of, the law of value mean that struggle is not just a struggle over proportion, an endless war over advantage, but is a more fundamentally antagonistic struggle. All struggles by the working class over its conditions of life, whether wages, hours, welfare or whatever assert a principle antagonistic to capital: that of production for use, human need joined to human capacity. In moving through the categories of the system the struggle cannot help but show the intrinsic limit of the system. Of course this is not magically transformed into communism. The point for now though is this, the struggle under the capitalist system is explosive and creative because within it there is the promise of a new social system. The contradiction of capital between value and use ensures that class struggle in continually confronting the limit of the system must develop theory. The antagonism over proportion cannot help but escalate to this more intransigent level. This not only enters the consciousness of the workers but also of the bourgeoisie.

The Enemy Within.

When confident of itself as the end of the tyranny of feudalism and as the completion of history, capital's tendency is towards the unified wage and, under production for exchange, the full subordination of needs to money. With Ricardo we find a ready confidence that workers are growing in independence and coming to a knowledge of political economy. Capital appears here in all the glory of an inviolable objectivity. This objectivity stands as the absence of a collectively constituted subjectivity. Workers' subjectivity is to amount to no more than individual knowledge of this ruling objectivity.

As the division of labour progresses, and with it the formation of the working class, so the assertion of the full subordination of needs to money appears as ever more dangerous to the survival of the bourgeois system. Real development forces on the political economists the recognition of a subjectivity in the working class that has torn away from this moment of capital's objectivity. The movement shifts gradually from the confident assertion of capital to its survival through the prevention of communism. In this movement the pivotal change is found in the orientation of the system to needs.

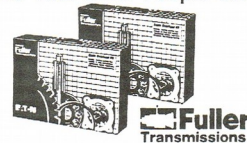
The process of class formation forces on capital the necessity to intervene in this formation. At the core of this intervention there must be a change in the orientation to needs, otherwise there could be no intervention in subjectivity. The political conditions of the unified wage allowed no scope for a political development of the working class within capital. Needs could not be recognised within

bourgeois political channels but are supposedly channelled through accumulation. At a certain point this becomes a dangerous political rigidity for capital. At this point simple repression of the social force of the working class is inadequate. Towards the end of the nineteenth century it is not just that the working class is recognised as an antagonistic force but also that it has acquired a social cohesion within which it could with impunity discuss the future of bourgeois society. This was some way from Ricardo's confident vision of the independent labourer whose subjectivity consisted of coming to knowledge of the system.

In relation to this subordination of subjectivity it could be said that the system, even if temporarily, had a type of objectivity to which Ricardo could apply his 'science' and explain 'natural' price. Such objectivity could only crumble when there arose within it a socially based subjectivity that was positing an alternative. This disrupted the 'science'. There was not only a growth of working class organisations but also of theory as coherent principle derived from a practice and experience that was antagonistic to political economy. Under the conditions of the unified wage these new movements would tend to monopolise a debate on the assertion of human needs. Political economy was recognised by the working class as an enemy; political economy itself had to change if political economy was to remain the same. The Leopard would change its spots.

From at least the 1870s but gathering an accelerating momentum from the mid-1880s there developed movements within respectable society that shared as their basis a recognition of the need to allow political channels in which working class movement could be constrained and defused. The intellectual and social development of this movement can be traced through the principal reformers of the later nineteenth century. In different thinkers and campaigners different elements are emphasised but in all there is the persistent need expressed for a new relation to the working class. The working class were not to evolve their own autonomous relation. Arnold Toynbee appeared as an early inspiration along with his friend (later Lord) Milner, also Samuel and Henrietta Barnett whose statistical work on working class living standards helped Charles Booth to take up his project to make a social survey of London. There was also W.T. Stead, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, collaborator with William Booth, Benjamin Kidd, the Webbs, Alfred Marshall, L.T. Hobhouse, and so it goes on. This cannot be an exhaustive list, only indicative. For now what I am concerned with is the theoretical development; the social and intellectual history can follow in a

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The crucial point is that a need for working class development within capital was recognised and that the unified wage was an obstacle to that development. In as much as the system is founded on the subordination of needs to money so each successive stage of struggle threatens to be more explosive in its effects on bourgeois society. Intervention, necessary to the survival of bourgeois society required intervention in the regime of needs. Class formation could not be repressed without the antagonism between use and exchange value being socialised. This potential, deadly to bourgeois society, imposed on it the necessity for some controlled recognition of need if that class formation were to be intervened in. Bourgeois society developed its own socialism on the basis of a divided wage.

The Division of the Wage.

At the core of the new political economy, interventionist in relation to class formation, was the modification of absolute poverty. Needs would be recognised outside the unified wage. There was instituted a divided wage, on one side the enterprise wage still subject to the disciplines of profit and on the other the social wage subject to the disciplines of administration. It is at this point that we can speak of the emergence of partial suspensions of the law of value. The regime of needs lived by the working class was changed; it is still a regime, of course, but through the divided wage there was a modification in the orientation to needs. There could exist need recognition outside the immediate discipline of exchange, of money. This would in turn affect the relation between abstract and concrete labour. As we have seen a vital condition of abstract labour is absolute poverty; if this is modified, if economic security displaces the cold rule of money then the substance of accumulation itself may be blocked. Capital may tend to find itself confronting an all too concrete labour in the sense that sets of needs have entered an arena in which political negotiation appears to replace the immediate discipline of enterprise calculation.

Partial suspensions should not of course be confused with complete abolishment. Where something is partially suspended it should be clear that it still operates, if in a modified form. The real question is how it operates. This is what needs to be explained and this will require a development of points already made. I have already emphasised above that the law of value is not simply a mechanism of distribution and nor is it adequate that abstract labour is established through exchange. The law of value as the mediation of social labour is also the form of existence of that labour, its social atomisation, and requires for its inseparable condition the necessity on the part of labour to sell its labour power. This point is worth emphasising with another quote from Marx, "For the domination of exchange value itself, and of exchange-value-producing production, presupposes alien labour capacity itself as an exchange value - i.e. the separation of living labour capacity from its objective conditions; a relation to them - or to its own objectivity - as alien property; a relation to them, in a word, as capital." (Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp509-10 see also pp514-5). It is clear that production for value, the alienation of living labour, is inseparable from exchange value. The domination of the latter must entail the former.

Partial suspensions of the law of value are suspensions of the form of existence subordinated to money. The division of the wage institutes a new regime of needs. It seems at first just to be an additional channel yet it cannot help but alter the operation of the system. The actual history need not concern us for now. What is crucial is that a set of needs were recognised outside the immediate discipline of accumulation. The areas covered by the divided wage included unemployment benefit, income support, pensions, sickness benefit, administered pricing of food and housing, and health. In each area there is a formal recognition of need. What this means is the recognition of need in such a way as to promise economic



security apart from the individual wage bargain. Where the immediate discipline of accumulation is absent then various administrative structures have to be set up. Bureaucratic procedures and data systems were set up to ensure need recognition did not get out of hand. The claim made here is not that the formal recognition of need is synonymous with the granting of a right to subsistence but rather that a significant shift in the regime of needs occurred.

There are several levels to this recognition of need. We call it formal in order to capture something of its ambiguity. It never constitutes an explicit right yet in effect this is its ever present promise, indeed it is *de facto* treated as such by the working class. Against this is set the bureaucratic policing of the formality of the need. This leads to a particular aspect of the formality of the recognition. Although, for example a need for housing is recognised, so rents are controlled, tenancies are secured and houses are allocated outside the market etc, this recognition is never certain. There remain not only shortages but also poor quality in terms of such things as damp, infestation, size, location, as well as administered divisions such as on the basis of race. The recognition is there, can be accessed, but falls short of what would be planned. This highlights an important element in the meaning of formal recognition; it remains mediated and separated from capacity. Although the discipline is not immediate, the ultimate purpose of the changes is to preserve accumulation. As such need recognition must be formal, fixing poverty rather than relieving it, and the endemic scarcity of the system no longer takes on a natural air but is identified with administration itself.

Administration: the Precise Form of Capital's Ambiguity.

The division of the wage opened a channel that confounded the impact of the radical critique. An ersatz politics could develop, crucially within capital. It was ersatz because it presupposed containment in class rule, continued production for value, even if it did have to be founded on real changes. This project, now identified as left-wing or socialist, had its roots earlier but its appearance as a distinct state strategy may be located in the People's Budget of 1909. From here there began a new regime for working class needs and an effective intervention into the development of working class organisation.

Starting from the law of value as the core we can through its partial suspensions explain the development of administrative forms. The formal recognition of need that lies at the base of the divided wage and hence the welfare state conflicts with the subordination of needs that characterises the full operation of the law of value. It allows space in the modification of the conditions of absolute poverty for an evasion of life as labour capacity. Given that the purpose of the divided wage is to preserve the rule of capital, the formal recognition of need has to be controlled within the continu-

ing discipline of the requirements of the law of value. From this impossible situation we can trace the growth of the state administrative forms in the twentieth century.

Administration is excreted by a system that is forced to recognise and cannot recognise need, a system whose substance is abstract labour, indifference to particular labours, producing for value, but that must allow a political channel recognising concrete labour. Rather than ensuring that needs are met i.e. rather than the social relation of planning, administration must ensure their containment, restriction and limitation. Entitlement is subdivided into administrative categories that in turn subdivide the class. There had to be a recognition of need in formal channels but there could not be social abundance. Here then the independent labourer of classical political economy is to be preserved as worker by a promotion to citizen with entitlements policed in the welfare administrative forms. This is not planning. It is rather a tendency to anti-planning, the prevention and interception of class formation.

As has been observed in a theoretical work on the state (Kay and Mott, *Political Order and The Law of Labour*, Macmillan 1982), we can detect in administration the archaeological remains of class struggle. They point out that the origin of the word administration is appropriately in the management of the estates of deceased people. The matter of left or right wing is scarcely of interest. The struggle is absorbed but as its opposite; a dead administrative form. The struggle becomes the citizen. It is no accident that this process is analogous to the absorption of living labour by dead. The absorption of struggle appears as the formal recognition of need that removes the occasion for solidarity and hence the conditions of class formation. To put it simply there is no concession that is not also preservation of atomisation. The formal recognition of need bears with it the requirement that it be administered. Offices, rules, classifications, queues, all these preserve need as a limited entitlement and on the condition of atomisation. In this way intervention in class formation can be made compatible with accumulation.

Commodity fetishism is modified by direct administration. Social relations are mediated within direct administrative structures. These are essentially anti-planning; the condition and indeed purpose of their existence is the social absence of the class. They preserve the formality of need recognition within the law of value. Commodity fetishism is preserved by an administrative channel that allows the development of a political form, social democracy, which includes the Labour Party and a particular form of trade unionism. They appear in dialogue rather than antagonism. It is a curious situation in which social democracy does not confront commodity fetishism yet it speaks a language of need. Its compatibility with the law of value arises from the separation of political and economic spheres that it not only accepts but also by its existence confirms. This separation expresses and preserves the continued separation of need and capacity. Since social democracy allows a discussion of need within its narrow political confines it appears to normalise the separation.

Under these conditions communism not only appears as unnecessary but more importantly as utopian since the basis of the struggle that could achieve it can always be undermined. It is because of this that the division of the wage is a central development within political economy. It is the precise form of capital's ambiguity.

The problem for capital is that the conditions it sets up for the prevention of communism become, in turn, the basis of a new struggle. It appears then to capital that the division of the wage has become the source of struggle rather than its containment. The formal recognition of need provides a focus and indeed base of struggle that evades the limits of the organisational representatives, the trade unions and Labour Party, within which the formal recognition was intended to channel class formation. This breakdown was expressed outside the factory as well as in workplace relations,

unofficial strikes, control over pace of work, resistance to productivity deals etc. Eventually and inevitably, the conditions of the divided wage were identified as part of an interlocking social package that had obstructed adequate control over the workplace.

The real problem for capital in all this is that any partial suspension threatens the reproduction of labour capacity as an exchange value. Yet at the same time some modification of the absolute poverty of the working class becomes necessary if capital is to survive. The pivotal change that capital must endeavour to contain and live with is the recognition of need. Simply, such social recognition contradicts absolute poverty and so threatens the formation of labour capacity. The substance of capital is abstract labour; the unified wage is the form by which money confronts this labour. The divided wage mitigates this confrontation.

Concrete Labour, Particularity and Resistance.

To accumulate, capital cannot simply put into motion abstract labour; it must pass through particular labours, concrete labour. The indifference, nevertheless, of capital to the concrete labours is its indifference to use values as such, in other words the subordination of needs to accumulation. This is no formal requirement. The actual control in the workplace is dependent on this overall social condition. Indifference of capital to concrete labours is for the worker substitutability. This is the threat of ruin. To illustrate the significance of this we must turn to a third aspect of abstract labour.

We have identified abstract labour as established in exchange. We have seen further that this required absolute poverty for it to be generalised. In this sense abstract labour is also the condition of the labourer shorn of all specific abilities, shorn of all use-making capacity and hence requiring the sale of labour power to the capitalist. The problem for capital comes in trying to ensure a fair deal, a fair day's work in return for the wage. Of course supervisors, management systems, co-operation etc are all of use but what, ultimately do they depend on? The worker's substitutability is crucial and this depends on abstraction. Yet at the same time capital cannot float in mid-air. It must produce and sell actual things that require concrete labour. Capital's circuit must pass through concrete labour. This presents a problem of control. Concrete labour can involve specific tasks that are not necessarily substitutable. Worse,

CRITIQUE 25

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over time, as workers gain confidence based on principles of solidarity known to themselves and other workers, skills can and are imposed on capital as forms of counter control by workers. Or, the fear of substitutability is overcome through the generalised level of struggle across many different sectors.

In these conditions there is a tendency for workplace discipline to flounder. To reassert control capital must reassert the abstraction of labour. Recession is one means of this but the crucial means that is associated with recession or crisis is through machinery. The particular labours on which workers had been able to develop their refractory hand are absorbed into machinery. Skills tend to be abolished as there is a tendency for the system to achieve its indifference to particular labours as an actual form of labour. Concrete labour itself, being in fact developed through the circuits of capital tends to the peculiarly capitalist form of labour, to abstract labour, to mere work without redeeming feature. This tendency is imposed by the requirements of exchange, the realisation of profit in exchange. Capital accumulation, whose substance is abstract labour and depends on abstract labour, also develops concrete labour to actualise abstract labour. Of course, as this development advances it tends to automation and hence to conditions of abundance where labour as the basis of the system, as value, is abolished. With greater struggle so capital must seek escape from concrete labours but in doing so tends to abolish its own presuppositions. The struggle itself, the subjective, moving through the objective categories of the system, forces the system to achieve the conditions of communism.

We have examined this relation between abstract labour and the workplace without linking it to the development of forms of welfare. We have seen that labour process control is especially dependent on general social conditions. With formal recognition of need these social conditions are partially modified. Administrative procedures must ensure the continuation of workplace control. At the same time there was a tendency for there to be negotiated deals, productivity deals, and incomes policies for which the presence of the welfare state is itself part of the deal. In this situation the labour movement develops a rigid and centralised bureaucracy that must police the deals on which its position depends. Counter to this the working class experience a greater economic security because of the formal recognition of need. This obstructs control in the workplace and instead enhances the particularity of labour. This may be overcome by central negotiation but this in time is undermined by a working class that resists and opposes the bureaucratisation of the movement.

This resistance is enabled by the welfare state itself since certain requirements for which the working class had depended on its own movement were displaced by the welfare state. The success of welfare in disorganising the movement was also the condition by which the working class could achieve some independence from its bureaucratisation.

Confronted by these conditions it is understandable that the call for the right to manage and the attack on the welfare state have gone hand in hand. While many on the right may now criticise and find fault with the achievements of Thatcherism there remains still a tenacious hold on the belief that Thatcherism allowed a 'revolution' in management control. Indeed this is a real legacy of the changes since 1974. This change though has been achieved through the re-emphasis of the power of money over needs and the dissolution of forms of negotiation. The system cannot avoid its basis in abstract labour as the substance of value. The creation or enhancement of a new managerial stratum has been achieved on the back of growing economic anxiety, the dismantling of the welfare state. Insecurity from cradle to grave has become the watchword for today's state reform. It is also the condition for the evolution of new working class forms and cultures of resistance. This in turn acts as a break on the proposed dismantling of the welfare state in as much as her majesty

still requires a loyal opposition that has a modicum of credibility.

The fight against inflation with its cost in unemployment has been the visible thrust of the right's campaign. At its heart has been the steady erosion of the divided wage, under the heading of supply-side economics, as the so called consumer is put at the centre of economic life. The only consumer that matters in this regard is the consumer of labour power. As for the rest of us 'choice' is the dignified way in which we are expected to give up all hope of change, 'choice' is to be our immersion in economic atomism, the retrieval of a disciplining edge to absolute poverty. 'Choice' is how we give up more and more and learn to love it. Insecurity is reasserted as the foundation of work discipline. What we must observe now is the gradual change in the politics of the labour movement as it finds it increasingly difficult to express needs that arise from this economic insecurity and which must tend to focus on the money system as its enemy. This process has already started but is one that takes years and not days or months.

Analysis - For Communism

The analysis presented here is certainly not complete. I have for example deliberately avoided the development of finance capital. This would have been crucial if we required now a full understanding of why it is suspension and not abolition of the law of value that is described here. Although this is important it is beyond the scope of this article's limited purpose. Nevertheless, some provisional conclusions can be offered.

Suffice to say for now that partial suspensions of the law of value have tended to mediate the tendency to abstract labour through nationalist frames that from the viewpoint of value quite arbitrarily link together large groups of concrete labour. This nationalisation of course had its political purpose in serving to undermine the international tendency of the workers' movement. This national element would however eventually become an obstacle, a basis of struggle, that was identified as the arterio-sclerosis of Europe. As capital escaped its national forms so it required the free purchase of labour power, the competition of a wider labour market.

The advantages of this basis of analysis can be summarised briefly:

1. The analysis puts the law of value at the centre. Agreement or disagreement requires a grasp of the law of value. This means that irrespective of the particular fate of this analysis it supports a tendency to escape the narrow confines of the left's political analysis, e.g. at its worst waffle about consciousness, culture etc, and to develop a theory at the level of political economy (and its critique). The question is whether any section of the left is capable of escaping the emergencies of the immediate situation to develop the new theories they all seem to promise but never deliver.
2. The analysis presents the law of value as inseparable from the state. This enhances the point above. The theory provides a simple theoretical explanation for administration that does not separate the phenomenon from 'economics' or whatever. Disagreement is forced to an understanding of the state that takes account of the vaunted simplicity of the present approach and must, in doing so, take account of the law of value.
3. The establishment of labour power is seen to be at the heart of the inseparability of state and law of value. Hence from the beginning needs and the forms of mediation are placed at the heart of the theory.
4. From the above it follows that there is presented here the basis for a clear theory of change that places the change in the control over surplus extraction and so the regime of needs as central.
5. This places the working class as a force, or power within the system, a power whose development provokes modification of the system's orientation to needs because its very nature as working class condemns it to be the object for money but the subject of the

struggle for needs. From division of labour mediated by exchange value to the struggle for production for use the movement to communism is seen as immanent to capital.

6. This theory explains the political phenomena of the twentieth century without recourse to external agencies, *deus ex machina* or some supposed inadequacy on the part of humanity. For example social democracy is located as having developed as the form dependent on the division of the wage, i.e. as an aspect of the modification of bourgeois political economy. We can explain real phenomena in the political sphere as arising from changes in the political economy and these in turn result from the development of the historic subject as a consequence of the development of the division of labour. The system has its own motion; the subjective is internal to it, we might say as an objective aspect.

7. The analysis confronts the same material that led people to the belief in *The Forward March of Labour Halted* but reaches quite different conclusions since the crucial element in this march was not the development of class subjectivity but rather alteration of bourgeois political economy to penetrate and forestall the basis for that subjectivity. It is not a forward march that is halted but the prevention of communism that is shown to be an inadequate social form.

8. From the present analysis it follows that the crisis of the organisational forms of the prevention of communism is a crisis of a relation to the working class. Underneath this lies the far more serious issue, in fact the dominant issue, what will be the outcome of the present changes in the labour movement? Will the current organisational forms of the working class, the incumbent labour movement, develop? What has been revealed is that these forms were inadequate for subsuming the working class. The relation to needs that is implicit in working class struggle implies also a social content that must supersede the inadequacies of administration. This in turn implies a far more serious crisis in a labour movement that has been too often tied into administration. However there is no magical transformation of working class organisation; the forms of resistance to the imposed peace of the welfare state cannot adjust immediately to the erosion of the welfare state.

The ambiguity of capital continues. If the prevention of communism was inadequate it might appear that the free market is the only social logic since the formal recognition of need 'failed'. Yet as the welfare state is questioned, as unemployment grows and economic anxiety becomes the central principle of the market of choices, the end of guaranteeism, so it would appear that the working class is pushed into defending the welfare state. Yet despite resistance at local level and over particular issues this has not happened in any significant manner, notwithstanding important skirmishes such as the poll tax. The Labour Party and TUC have so far survived the social upheavals although changes are obviously in train.

If, as many have predicted, unemployment is here to stay, if even recoveries will not get rid of the problem and if as also seems likely, especially in Britain, that the recoveries themselves are short-lived and if we are therefore to see more Dundee Timeses in conjunction with more drastic reductions and modifications of the welfare state then inevitably the present forms of working class organisation will prove inadequate. In a small but still significant way we have already seen this in the poll tax campaign. The problem for capital is to find forms that are adequate to control the working class. For us the problem is whether crises in the labour movement will sound the death-knell of bourgeois society.

The analysis presented here is a reaffirmation of communism as the tendency of the struggle. The placing of needs at the centre, simultaneously places the working class at the centre not simply as an agent of struggle but as the bearer of a new organisational principle that, in its inescapable antagonism to value, must make capital a socially explosive and eventually doomed system.

NEW INTERVENTIONS

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Revolutionary movements, theory and practice: The Peruvian experience of the 1980s

Why has the Maoist guerilla movement, Sendero Luminoso (the Shining Path), thrived when the rest of Stalinism is in such crisis? By Bill Langan

"Father of mine, your face like the great sky, hear me: the heart of the señores is now more terrifying, more filthy, inspires more hate. They have corrupted our very own brothers, twisted their hearts and together killing us armed with weapons that the king of devils himself couldn't invent or produce. And yet there is a great light in our lives! We are shining! We have descended upon the city of the señores. It is from there that I speak to you. We have descended like the endless columns of ants in the great jungle. Here we are, with you beloved leader, unforgettable, eternal Amaru." (Jose Marie Arguedas, leading Peruvian indigenist author, from his extended poem "To Our Creator-Father Tupac Amaru" in his work Katakay)

In 1968 the military took power in Peru and, presenting themselves as a 'national revolutionary government', managed to re-channel much of the revolutionary ferment affecting all social sectors under their 'democratic' predecessors, with extensive land reform, nationalization and development programmes. In the harsher international climate of the mid-70s its reformism ran out of steam, giving way firstly to monetarism and then a return to democracy under popular pressure at the end of the decade.

During the 1980 elections which marked this transition, the Communist Party of Peru (Sendero Luminoso) declared the start of its 'popular war' after nearly a decade of 'reconstitution'. The conservative Belaunde government (1980-85) was succeeded by the left-nationalist APRA government (1985-90), which in turn was defeated by the current president, Alberto Fujimori. He has played for popularity by portraying himself as a technocrat separate from and above the 'corrupt' political class. Indeed, he closed down the Congress in May 1992, reopening it with elections in November of the same year, which were boycotted by the traditional opposition parties. He is a new breed of populist, who has made greater use than any previous leader of direct appeal to the populace via television and radio, particularly in the 'war on subversion'. Sendero has overcome some harsh setbacks over the years, but all depends now on their ability to overcome the capture of leader Abimael Guzman in September 1992.

Contrary to popular belief, Peru is not a country of peasants, but one where two-thirds of the population are now 'urban'. However, a large part of this 'urban' population is concentrated in and around provincial towns and they maintain close family and trade links with the rural population. Although the growth of the informal sector in urban areas has been widely commented on, what is more striking statistically is the pauperization of this sector over the decade in terms of income levels compared to that of the more traditional working class.

Peru is a country rich in characters who have striven to compose radical theory which

can then be put into practice. At the turn of the century, for example, the Peruvian anarchist movement was inspired by the ideas and contributions of one Gonzalez Prada, the first writer to address the so-called indian problem from a revolutionary position. He was followed in the twenties by the marxist analysis of Jose Carlos Mariategui, Peru's foremost historical figure on the left, who also founded the original PCP (Communist Party of Peru), and whose writings and influence deserve an article of their own. Later we have the Trotskyist Hugo Blanco, a key figure in the 1960s peasant uprisings and guerrilla insurgency, and we also find that the 'Liberation Theology' of radical Catholicism originated as a concept with the Peruvian Gustavo Gutierrez.

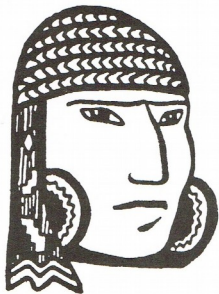
The leader of the PCP-SL, Abimael Guzman styles himself as the successor to Mao, and I think that within that authoritarian marxist tradition of Lenin-Stalin-Mao, he probably has every right to, given his record of applying theory to practice. His so-called Gonzalo Thinking is basically an adaption of maoism to the Peruvian situation, dominated by the idea of Power and how to conquer it, the Struggle of Two Lines, the militarized political party, and his historical analysis (all described *ad nauseum* in a widely available interview from 1987).

The Social Movement Theorists

What I would like to do is to hold up the experience of Sendero (as a revolutionary movement acting in modern conditions) to some of the theories about social movements that began to become popular just as in fact they began their 'popular war'. I have only looked at the Peruvian upholders of these theories, but I think you'll agree that they form part of an international trend. So I'll start by commenting on the main points of these new theories and then the aspects of Sendero which are relevant to this comparison.

The new studies of social and political movements which emerged at the beginning of the eighties sought to overcome what was seen as the dogmas of the old theories which had concentrated on the complementary roles of class, state and power: the key phrases were instead now grassroots social movements, citizenship and democracy. There was a strong urban bias, in keeping with the urbanization trend and which corresponded to the idea of trying to use social reality as a base for theory, rather than the old habit of making the reality fit the theory. We see this in the new trend towards social history rather than the history of impersonal structures as a means of recording the past.

This theoretical trend coincided with an important political development: the relatively peaceful end of military rule in Peru at the end of the 1970s. As in Spain at approximately the same time, and other countries



that experienced such a transition, a democratic euphoria accompanied the end of dictatorship. This euphoria was shared by virtually all the left apart from Sendero. The traditional peasant and workers movements lost their importance as academic interest refocused itself on movements whose demands corresponded not just to the productive sphere. As for how to effect political change Gramsci appeared to offer the answer for these 'new times' with his idea that these new social movements could form part of national popular blocs: social alliances replacing the old class-based formations.

The new theorists identified a series of new characteristics of social struggle in the 'new democratic environment'. These were:

1) **Change in Social Structure:** that new sectors such as the 'informal sector' would assume greater importance than traditional categories of urban and rural workers.

2) **New Organizations:** that in keeping with the above structural change, new small scale 'micro-level' organizations would assume more importance than the old mass organizations (unions and peasant federations).

3) **New Struggles:** the idea that the 1980s movements would be concerned with demands other than the old 'class-based' demands.

4) **New Methods of Struggle:** that the age of direct action had ended. While this meant a lot of positive eye-opening, these new ideas often led to the throwing out of class as a means of looking at society, and revolution as a feasible solution. Because of that I'll argue that on the one hand, the experience of the eighties, with the joint rise and fall of the new social movements and the democratic left in Peru, suggests that something was wrong with the conclusions drawn from the ideas that went accompanying both. And, on the other hand, that the new theorists were incapable of understanding the rise of a revolutionary movement such as Sendero.

Social Base

One of the first questions raised about Sendero is what is their social base, and what is their appeal? What I want to emphasize is the impossibility of pigeonholing (as so many have tried to) the answers to both questions.

Firstly, the social origin of the party members who were joining from the late sixties onwards and were thus 'in' on the start of the war in 1980 can be generalized as students and teachers who would often have a peasant background but had moved to provincial towns for educational reasons (as the beneficiaries of a national trend towards popular education in the state sector). Now, given that virtually every urban dweller in Peru has close relations in the country, you're talking about quite a wide and typical section of people making up the original militancy, not a purely 'peasant army' but neither exactly a 'urban middle class elite', a label favoured by Sendero's detractors on the left who contrast it to the 'true' armies of the oppressed such as the Sandinistas and Castro's followers. To criticise Sendero it is not necessary to falsify their nature and mythologize the latter guerrilla - cum - regimes.

The party has continued ever since to recruit heavily amongst young people with close links to both urban and rural life. A son of a landowner once simply said to me, 'peasant plus university = terrorist'.

Secondly, the peasantry is seen as 'principal force' in the overall war strategy and the rural areas have always been a main focus of Sendero activity as they have recruited among young peasants for both static support and to make up mobile columns. Peasantry is maybe now something of a misnomer as the rural population (who now make up little over a third of the total) are largely incorporated in the market economy, and so Sendero correctly identify them as 'rural proletariat'.

Thirdly and finally, in the urban sector Sendero is active in traditional industrial sectors, but does not favour them above other areas of struggle. Rather it has kept abreast of the fact that many of

the working class are employed in small-scale labour operations in the so-called informal sector. Everyone from the very poor (working class) and the relatively prosperous (lower middle class) sectors are the object of Sendero's work? (an example of Sendero's involvement in this sector is that in the town where I lived a teacher was shot dead on the local university campus, because in his position as a town council member he was involved in a major dispute with the town's street traders).

To understand the nature of this work I think we have to locate its activities in the perspective of an overall strategy that deals with all areas of urban life such as neighborhood organizations, housing, education, producers/traders associations, morality, justice, movement on the streets, cultural life.... There are many examples of their work in each one of these areas, which is carried out by a complex web of front organizations, as well as lower level intervention in already existing organizations.

In both town and country the Party tries to eventually convert itself into the guardian of every aspect of social activity. The idea (and the practice) is to create a shadow state which begins by operating clandestinely, and when the time is right, emerges more openly. And as with all states, the bottom line of social control is the threat of violence.

Social Appeal

We can't take the movement's slogans at face value. The rhetoric varies according to the audience addressed. For a movement to effect social change it has been suggested that it must work at three levels: the *daily or micro-level*, the *sectoral level* and the *national level*, and synthesize the three. Sendero has to some extent done this: At the daily or neighborhood level the slogans are reformist: *Electricity and Water for the Barrios!*, *Down with the Rent Rise!* Particular groups are organized around their specific demands (eg squatters or small businessmen in the towns or coca-growers in the country). This can be done through infiltrating already existing local associations or unions.

On the sectoral level, the front organizations operating in different local struggles draw likely recruits into the wider scheme of things. The front organization is seen as an operation which represents the party in different localities on a sectoral level, such as the Young Peoples Popular Movement in schools/colleges, *Classist Neighbourhood Movement* in residents associations, etc. In this way the recruit enters into contact with the party, and starts to learn the revolutionary rhetoric via intensive, parrot-fashion ideological training.

But when Abimael Guzman's own philosophy teacher and great personal influence was asked in an interview, what do you think of all these simple Maoist slogans that your ex-pupil's followers churn out, he just laughed and dismissed it as verbal fodder. So on a national level there is serious ideological work being done which represents the combining of theory and practice on a very high level. This is why I talk about the war in Peru as being one in which ideology is given a uniquely privileged role, which of course relates to the strong tradition of revolutionary theory in the country, mentioned earlier.

Although I have emphasized the complex nature of the Party's structures, it's obviously wrong to go overboard and see it as some kind of completely well-oiled machine, above and beyond the actual human beings who run it! This is the image the party itself often convincingly portrays, but obviously there are overlaps between different sub-groups in the Party and breakdowns of structure.

The key point then is that Sendero works across all type of social sector and class. Furthermore, despite the apparent rigidity of its doctrine it is very responsive to social trends that affect these divisions, such as migrations or the informal sector. This grasp of

modern and changing conditions has been the key to its success. Instead of asking why Sendero achieved what it has, maybe we should ask, why has it not got further?

Consequences for SM theorists

So what are the consequences of the 'Sendero experience' for the various social movements theories? Well it clearly challenges the conclusion that a class-based revolutionary movement cannot get to grips with the new conditions. To go back to the formulation of the SM theorists:

In terms of the *new composition of the working class*, the party has shown itself broad-based enough in its strategy to accommodate all different sectors of the working class and some sectors of the middle class. This new composition has, it should be added, been highly exaggerated, because there has always been a large and at various times politicized informal sector.

In terms of *new 'micro-level' organizations* it has either tried to dominate these or else destroy and replace them, with the use of front organizations.

In terms of *new struggles* SL has simply tried to head any type of popular demand going, including those of 'citizens rights' as opposed to 'workers rights'.

Finally, as far as new forms of struggle go, the party has been the first to try (not always with success) to develop these in order to replace the old forms of struggle which the state learnt to handle. A main example is the Armed Strike which at its most effective has managed to paralyze Lima.

The new theories were largely correct in their observations, most of all in their attempt to look at *all* areas of social life in place of a vulgar economic focus. This is important because it is the all-encompassing nature of SL's strategy, applying itself to all aspects of social life, which I believe is the key to their success. Groups such as the Stalinist PCP-Unidad which concentrated all their efforts on building trade union power bases, have found themselves at the end of the 1980s in the position of Emperors with No Clothes On. The irony, then, is that Sendero took the key observations of the 'new times' analysts in their stride, and incorporated those observations within their own strategy.

The new social movement theorists and their many fellow travellers, both academic and political, got many of their observations right. But their *conclusion*: that the advent of democracy made class-based revolutionary movements redundant, and their *anticipation*: that small scale cross-class popular bloc movements would provide the basis for popular politics in the 'new times', have both been shown (in the Peruvian case) to be wrong.

How then has Sendero adapted itself to the new conditions which the theorists identified? What I think we learn is that a revolutionary movement in these modern conditions must have a *continually extending* social base and geographical base to overcome repression (this is something Sendero learnt through practice: when the military launched a major flushing out campaign in their original base province of Ayacucho in 83/84, the party was partly forced to relocate its activities to new areas.) By looking at society such as the Peruvian one in its totality, we can see that there are many different *'points of power'* that a revolutionary strategy needs to deal with, by capturing or neutralizing each one. In this way we can look at Sendero's strategy and the state's counter-strategy with regard to the peasant self-defence groups, the MRTA (Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement - Peru's other main guerrilla force), the unions, universities etc, etc.

The failure of the new social movements to provide the embryo for national change can, apart from anything else, be linked to the shortcomings of 'democracy' in Latin America generally. The popularity of the theory went hand in hand with the democratic euphoria which accompanied it in Peru and elsewhere upon the end

of military rule in the late 1970s, therefore the fate of the theory is linked to the fate of these 'democracies'. Neither have really fulfilled their promises in practice. *The shortcomings of the social democratic model make necessary a revolutionary critique of Peru's political realities which is relevant to both theory and practice. Such a critique needs to take seriously the evidence of Sendero's experience, whatever our many misgivings about their politics, rather than seeing it as a freak aberration or guerrilla leftover from the sixties.*

'Analyzing the Analysts'

I would like now to go over why so far such a critique is barely available. Having looked at the theoretically based defenders of Peru's social democracy, we now need to 'analyze the analysts' of Sendero itself: the self-styled experts on Peru's high level of social conflict. This means identifying the political associations and ideological assumptions which underline their work (and hence a large part of our information).

Virtually all analysts whose books or articles you might find come somewhere along the scale between those on the reforming left and those who are basically military advisors in an academic guise, the so-called 'counter-insurgency experts'. I describe them as being on a scale rather than as two distinct groups, because there is a grey area, and the difference between the two is becoming even more blurred in line with the global post-Cold War trend towards a naked convergence of interests between the 'left' and the 'right' under capitalism. Both 'ends on the scale' express their main aim to be protecting Peruvian 'democracy'. Which translates as: how do we defeat Sendero and protect the State?

This grey area regularly manifests itself. At a recent meeting in London for instance John Crabtree, a sympathetic author-critic on the Peruvian left shared a table with Rosemary Thorp, an Oxford economist who tutored Fujimori's until-recently Economy Minister and called for greater liberalization in the 1980s. The blurred lines are also there when the leftist analysts complain that the right wing Fujimori government does not listen to their proposals, or indeed when the government *does* listen, without admitting it of course, and embark on symbolic social help programs such as the army going into shantytowns to distribute free food and haircuts.

It is not necessarily the counter-insurgency people who are less accurate, as they are not weighed down like the leftists are by an alternative programme for administering capitalism which they have to put in every piece of writing. They are much better about simply seeking out and presenting information on Sendero so that the government, military or business know just what the score is: one of the most realistic assessments of the continuing conflict in Peru after Guzman's arrest came from Gordon McCormick, an advisor to the American Rand Corporation, in an interview with the liberal Peruvian news weekly *Caretas* (Nov 92).

The leftist analysts are compromised by association just as much as their rightwing counterparts are. They share a common ground with the solidarity campaigns, the charities and non-governmental organizations (ONGs), and the leftwing politicians. I'm not trying to make them out to be some organized mafia, simply pointing out the connections. For instance, I found Peruvians well aware that many ONGs were jobs-for-the-boys outfits for the left wing parties. Anyway, the analysts and those outfits share the basic beliefs in the rule of parliament, constitution and all the other trappings of the modern democratic state, and as organizations (not necessarily individuals) oppose revolution, violent overthrow etc.

These analysts are informed by certain key themes which, while all containing certain essential truths, are harnessed in favour of an anti-revolutionary perspective, which puts the onus on an elected government to make the necessary changes.

One such theme is of course *Human Rights*. It is not my

intention here to go into the flaws of human rights as a concept, suffice to say that both the military and the PCP (SL) have been guilty of gross abuses of ordinary people. But this is in their nature as authoritarian institutions belonging to a state and a shadow state respectively. On practical grounds this theme is directly relevant to leftist analysts, as the reformist left are often victim of both state and Sendero attacks.

Another is the idea of the people *caught between two fires* - that the war is being fought between two merciless outside factions, with the 'ordinary people' caught haplessly in the middle. It is certainly true that anyone trying to work outside the Fujimori state and Sendero's shadow state is a potential victim of both. However this refrain is also used to make the populace appear a passive community, and particularly lends itself to such a stereotyping of the peasantry, who would presumably be happier half-starving and growing crops for Western export than hoisting the flag of revolt. The reasons for revolt remain valid and real, and the government is worried about the prospect of the (originally rural but now going urban) citizens self-defence militias which it originally armed turning their sights on their masters.

Finally there is the idea that *greater social spending* and democratization are necessary to defeat Sendero: which brings us back to the basic dilemma of the reformist left: that such a programme would still have to go hand in hand with a military operation. In other words: continued war.

So we see that the analysts of Sendero are not in a hot air balloon overlooking events, but play a direct role as advisors through *association*, on the one hand, with the reformist left and associated institutions, on the other hand, with both the Peruvian and foreign state, military and business institutions, and ever more obviously with both.

In developing a revolutionary critique of the situation, I think we also need to decide on what forces to associate with, both in terms of their theory and their political practice. For anyone who finds themselves there, this is a very real question.

Firstly there is of course Sendero itself. In terms of numbers, capability and territory it is obviously still the key revolutionary force. But of course unless you're in the inner circle, there's no room for non-party line thinking except say in an internal crisis which reaches up to the highest level (which must be what happened after the arrest of Guzman). Probably every Peruvian who flirts with radical politics has to decide personally how to relate to the Party. In normal times ideological debate is seen as super-dangerous to the party's discipline and cohesiveness, the party is only there to instruct. As one person (involved in a supportive role to the Party) said to me with some awe, 'the comrades have an answer to everything'. In the Cusco region a new guerrilla column started up around 1987 which wanted to support the armed struggle while remaining outside the Party. By all accounts they were virtually eliminated by Sendero, after wielding some influence in the region.

The other main guerrilla group is the MRTA who have a classic Latin American guerrilla ideology, trying to be what they would call the armed wing of the popular movement along FMLN/Sandinista lines. What others would call the armed wing of the bourgeois left. The MRTA would appear to be a more broad-based movement but has in fact been fraught by internal power struggles resulting in public splits, desertions, and murders of rival leaders. It is difficult to know how much of a future they have, as their only opportunity for growth appears to be if the official left or factions of it, is pushed further out of the political spectrum - which is actually a possibility now that it has virtually no parliamentary representation. Certainly the Robin Hood nature of many of the MRTA's actions are designed to make people morally sympathetic, and a lot of hopes for a humane but revolutionary 'third alternative' have been pinned on them over the years.

As for the official left itself, it is really now on a life support

machine more than ever since its re-entrance into national politics in the late seventies. As in so many other countries in the world now, it's popularly identified as part of the whole corrupt party political circus. Its Congress representation was almost decimated in the December 1992 elections, it now retains power only on a limited local level. Its credibility was also indirectly damaged by the complete failure of the supposedly left of centre APRA government of the mid eighties, which really showed the limits of trying to apply populist left policies in a capitalist environment.

In the 1980s there was certainly a revolutionary flavour at the grassroots of the Peruvian left, tied in with the hopes that the new social movements would provide a new 'revolutionary subject'. But now it remains a set of leaders without followers, whose incorporation into the system was never made clearer than in January of this year, when the 'Democratic Left' grouping in Congress (a new proto-party arisen from the ashes of the once strong United Left) proposed a special Congress medal for military officers who excelled in the 'battle against subversion'!

Finally we come to the fringe groups who might or might not become relevant in the future. If they do become relevant it will probably be in terms of the legacy of their ideas rather than their small existing organizations. In Peru the trotskysts and anarchists are the only groups I know of with a revolutionary vision that challenges the Sendero/MRTA orthodoxies, (although the former are limited by their own authoritarian tendencies), and both groups have long and interesting histories of their own in the country. There is I believe potential for a popular renewal of the anarchist or libertarian socialist/communist vision.

The reason I believe there is such an audience owes itself to the tradition of grassroots rebellion in Peru itself. Although this tradition has been harnessed by Sendero and MRTA in the 1980s, it has in fact manifested itself under a variety of different flags over the decades and centuries, and indeed often under no flag at all. There is a history of communal acts against authority, from land seizures to supermarket looting.

On the other side of the coin there exists a strong tradition of *communalismo* and mutual self-help on the part of both rural and urban dwellers, which, although at various times taken up by political groups, has a life of its own beyond the timespan of such groups. Taking away the political conclusions of the analysts, many of what they identified as new social movements in the 1980s represented the urban continuation of this rural tradition of combating poverty and bettering communal life through mutual aid.

A proper examination of this twin tradition of anti-authoritarian struggle and mutual cooperation is outside the realms of this article, but provides an always strong potential alternative to both the social democracy of 'left' and 'right' and the stalinist authoritarianism of the PCP (SL).

(A campaign is being built up around the imprisonment of two anarchists in Peru, falsely accused of working for Sendero Luminoso. Donations are badly needed for legal fees and food (which is not supplied for prisoners). Contact: The Peruvian Solidarity Project of the Love & Rage Network, PO Box 3, Prince Street Station, New York, New York 10012, USA.)

Notes

- 1 The following four points are taken from *Movimientos sociales: Elementos para una relectura* (Social Movements: starting points for a reassessment) (Desco, Lima 1990).
- 2 Although individuals higher up the social scale than this may be attracted, and the press will always make great play of this, I have not yet seen evidence of an attempt to attract the more comfortable middle classes and upwards as a sector or class, although the support of sections of the 'national bourgeoisie' is envisaged in the anti-imperialist/popular front stage of Sendero's plans.
- 3 Three levels identified in the excellent book by Diego Palma, *Lo popular, la informalidad y cambio social* (The popular classes, the informal sector and social change) (Desco Lima 1990).
- 4 Author this year of *Peru under APRA: The Last Opportunity* (Oxford University Press), whose title says it all about his slant on the left nationalist government of Alan Garcia which ruled 1985-90.

Towards a political economy of stalinism

Paul B. Smith reviews Hillel Ticktin's recent book: *Origins of the Crisis in the USSR: Essays on the Political Economy of a Disintegrating System* (M.E. Sharpe, New York, 1992, ISBN 0-87332-888-4).

This is an important book. Written by a Marxist critic of both Western Sovietology and Stalinism, it is a major contribution to the critique of the political economy of the former USSR. As such it offers a refreshing contrast to the sterility of Cold War thought on the Soviet Union, whether bourgeois or socialist.

Over the last twenty years or so, Hillel Ticktin was probably the only theorist to predict that the USSR would disintegrate, arguing, contrary to scholars influenced by Cold War rhetoric, that it was a profoundly unstable social formation. He is, moreover, one of the few persons who made an attempt to understand its laws and tendencies by returning to the method of Marx's critique of political economy. For this reason his work has generally been ignored both by bourgeois sovietology and by the left. That he was right is confirmed by events. Ticktin's work makes it possible to emerge from a theoretical wilderness of competing political definitions of the USSR - 'degenerate workers state', 'state capitalist', 'bureaucratic collectivist', and so on.

Ticktin's work is better known in the USA than in Europe. He has lectured to hundreds of students in Los Angeles and appears regularly on phone-ins organised by independent radio. He is also known in South Africa where, since liberalisation, he has organised a large conference on the future of Marxism and had a newspaper article published on developments in the former Soviet Union. In the UK, he teaches at Glasgow University and edits the journal *Critique*. Through this journal he has developed a critique of the political economy of the USSR and enabled the publication of the work of left wing anti-stalinist scholars who would otherwise have gone unrecognised. He has written extensively on finance capital, class, capitalist decline, the nature of a socialist society, Trotsky, the Jewish Question, and the Gulf War. His first book, *The Politics of Race: Discrimination in South Africa*, was published by Pluto Press in 1991 and has been reviewed in recent issues of *Radical Chains*, *Searchlight South Africa*, and *Revolutionary History*. His work on the Soviet Union is now helping to challenge accepted ideas and stimulate debate amongst sections of the left.

The book's form as a collection of essays presented in chapters enables the reader to examine Ticktin's system as separate parts and as a whole. Anyone interested in finding an explanation for the failure of Gorbachev's *perestroika* should go straight to Ticktin's account of disintegration in the ninth chapter, skipping the rest of the material. Although written before the 1991 coup that brought Yeltsin to power, the information to be found there is a good introduction for anyone trying to understand contemporary developments. Chapter nine stands on its own as an elegant essay which demolishes illusions in so-called 'market socialism' and argues persuasively that attempts to force the market onto the working class will fail.

Ticktin's originality shines through most brilliantly in the second chapter on social control. Here the reader will enjoy studying a careful critique of the Cold War literature on the nature of the atomization of populations in totalitarian systems. Ticktin refines the category of atomization and creates a political economy of

bureaucratic dependency. Ticktin's understanding of the category of atomization is richer and deeper than any other, precisely because it contains within it a recognition of the form labour power takes in a declining capitalism: a decline within which the contradictions within value and abstract labour are becoming increasingly antagonistic - as capital struggles to contain combined labour within the sphere of exchangeability. To fully appreciate the subtleties of his argument it is helpful to have some understanding of categories derived from Marx, especially the discussion of dependence and independence to be found in the *Grundrisse* and that of commodity fetishism found in *Capital* and elsewhere.

Ticktin's arguments are persuasive whether or not one is a scholar of Marx. The reason for this is his grasp of method. Ticktin has not simply read *Capital* and then proceeded to impose the categories of commodity and value on the USSR. In the introduction to the *Grundrisse* Marx stated that theory must start from the concrete, the empirical reality of the society being discussed. Ticktin follows this approach, developing his categories in relation to both the vast amount of empirical research on the USSR that has taken place and the various explanatory frameworks that have been put forward by both right and left. His categories are not imported from some *a priori* schema but grow organically and logically out of the material he has studied. His knowledge of the Russian language (acquired in part through having lived and worked in the USSR itself) has enabled him to penetrate the *bureaucratess* of the official documents of the stalinist elite in which tone is just as important as content. This raises his understanding to a higher level than most on the left. Even if the reader rejects or is sceptical of Ticktin's theoretical foundations, she or he is likely to learn a great deal about the Soviet Union from this book.

The Ruling Elite.

Ticktin's thinking is demanding but rarely dull. The esoteric aspect to the book - the application of the categories of contradiction, law, actual and potential use-value, and real and imagined product - reveals quantity and quality of study which it is difficult to imagine being equalled by any contemporary Marxist. Yet Ticktin's presentation of categories neither obtrudes nor drifts from a path that is clear and exact. Practically every term he uses is carefully defined so that if the reader gets lost, she or he can retrace their steps to the point of confusion. This makes it easy to follow the logical relations between the categories and the direction of his thought.

For example, class is defined as 'a collectivity that has a particular relation to the extraction of the surplus product' (p.61). Surplus product is defined as 'that portion of the social product that a whole or part of the society has decided to allocate for uses other than the immediate satisfaction of the needs of those engaged in productive work: in other words, those who produce the surplus product itself' (p.10). These definitions are useful in deciding whether the members of the ruling group in the Stalinist system constitute a class. This belief is held to by adherents of the idea of



state capitalism, such as C L R James, Raya Dunayevskaya and Tony Cliff. In contrast, Ticktin argues that there was no ruling class within the Stalinist system. Control over the extraction of surplus product is almost completely restricted by a negative control that atomised workers have over the labour process. This manifests itself in absenteeism, sabotage, alcoholism and defective products. Moreover, the ruling group is also atomised. Members live in constant fear of losing their privileges and cannot pass them on to their children with any certainty. They are therefore insufficiently stable to form a collectivity. If they are prevented from forming a collectivity, then they cannot form a class.

How should this ruling group be described? Ticktin plumps for 'elite'. Despite its unfortunate sociological connotations, 'elite' has the advantage of suggesting that the ruling group is unstable and incoherent. He defines it as 'those people who have some limited control over the surplus product' (p.48). He goes on to argue that the attempt by the elite to escape the threat of its abolition motivates its members to aspire to achieving the stability, continuity and coherence of a class. This utopian dream drives them to shift the system towards the market.

The Political Economy of Stalinism.

Ticktin's aim is to provide an 'outline of the political economy of the USSR' (p.6). The fact that the USSR has formally ceased to exist hardly invalidates his work, for the entity for which he provides a political economy, and which is now disintegrating, is Stalinism. This started its life as the subjective doctrine of 'socialism in one country'. The doctrine took on an objective form when attempts were made to extract an absolute surplus from the working class and peasantry by brute force. This culminated in and survived the purges of the 1930s. The system formed out of this failed doctrine is now in terminal crisis. It may cease to exist before any viable social formation emerges out of its ruins.

Ticktin argues that the Stalinist system was never a planned society. Lack of control over the process of production by a democratic collectivity of freely associated producers makes all talk of planning in the Soviet Union meaningless. The atomization of the elite and of the working class makes impossible the communication necessary for planning. There is thus no sense in which the USSR can be described as a workers' state, however degenerate. Nation-

alisation in the absence of genuine workers control is not a sufficient condition for the existence of a workers' state.

Nor did the Soviet Union have any significant growth. The idea that the USSR was a growing economy is now disproved. Soviet statistics were deliberately falsified. The regime claimed that GNP had expanded ninety times over the last sixty years. Official sources now say that expansion was only six times during this period. When inflation has continued to be higher (3% per annum) than expansion of GNP (2.4% per annum), then growth in the economy is negative (p. 126). Moreover, growth of GNP is calculated as growth of net product: a quantitative increase of goods over time. But producer goods were so defective that they led to increasing shortages of consumer goods.

Defenders of the old USSR have argued that the regime was able to compete with capitalist countries in the space and arms races. They forget, however, that Soviet workers in the arms sector were both better paid and under strict military discipline. It is a fact that when workers are slaves or semi-slaves, they can be made to create products of some durability in a short space of time. The pyramids of Egypt and the Great Wall of China were made by such workers. The battleships and military aircraft of the First and Second World Wars were produced by workers under military discipline. Yet, besides the notable exception of the Kalashnikov rifle and a few other products, the majority of Soviet arms products are at such a low level of technique that they are unable to compete in the world market. No sensible nation will want to buy Soviet arms after the Gulf War. It is ironic that some left-wingers should use Soviet arms production to support the doctrine that the USSR had features which made it a superior mode of production to capitalism.

The Soviet Union was not a workers' state nor was it 'state capitalist'. It was based on the obliteration of commodity production and there was therefore no value, no money and no capital. By contrast with capitalist societies, where production is dominated by exchange value, Ticktin argues, 'in the case of the USSR ... use value is all important' (p.11).

Ticktin shows that the rouble does not function as money, because it does not exist as a measure of value. His first reference to money is an historical one: money was abolished in the early 1930s 'in order to deal with the massive shortages operating throughout the economy' (p.33). The wage is therefore 'nominal'. The rouble does not enable the worker to acquire 'an apartment, a car, or most consumer durables without being placed on a waiting list, and often he needs to belong to a particular institution with a particular status' (p.36). As the labour is semi-forced, through the social controls of atomization, the wage is in effect a type of pension (p.84). Ticktin makes a distinction between exchange value and value. Forms of exchange exist in the system but 'capital goods cannot be bought and sold, land cannot be bought and sold, and the transport system, construction, and housing for the individual are all virtually allocated or so heavily subsidised as to make all talk of purchase and sale a mockery' (p.133). The argument that money does not exist is developed in chapter nine where he states that 'There can only be value if labour power itself has value, or in other words, if it is bought and sold'. If there is no value, then there can be no measure of value. If there is no measure of value there can be no money. The rouble functions as a 'defective means of circulation' (p.160). Ticktin's account is fully consistent with Marx's in the *Grundrisse*

Origins of the Crisis in the USSR (£9.50)

The Politics of Race, Discrimination in South Africa (£5) ... by Hillel Ticktin

Both books are available from Critique books, c/o Bob Arnot, Dept. of Economics, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow G4 0BA

and *Capital*.

Is it possible for the rouble to be converted into money? Not without a capital market and a labour market. The former needs a stock market and bankruptcies and the latter needs unemployment and the right to hire and fire. This is what the elite are attempting to push through at time of writing (July 1992). Ticktin argues that this policy has already failed. Even if the figures of ten million unemployed predicted by the International Labour Organisation are achieved by the end of the year, he argues that at least forty million unemployed will be necessary to function as a reserve army of labour. Moreover, unemployment will not function to control the workers if the individualised control over the labour process breaks through its atomised form and becomes increasingly socialised and politicised. The control workers have will be strengthened further. It could only be broken if there is a massive aid package from the West which might serve to divide privileged from unprivileged workers. This is not forthcoming and will not be forthcoming during a period of world slump led by the American recession. It was only under intense political pressure from the G7 countries that the IMF reluctantly released one billion of the twenty four billion dollars promised Russia. As Bush has stated, trillions of dollars would be needed to rescue the Russian economy.

Stalinism and Decline.

What is the nature of this unlovely beast? How can we understand this historical black hole? Ticktin suggests that its dynamic is the outgrowth of the attempt to contain revolution in the context of capitalist decline.

Early on in the book, Ticktin states that Stalinism 'constitutes a conservative social formation that has taken on a monstrous and *sui generis* form precisely in order to prevent social revolution' (p.9). He says that it represented the victory of capitalism in preventing a move towards socialism. Like other non-viable social formations which copied it (such as China, Pol Pot's Cambodia, Ethiopia, Angola and Cuba) systematic repression is specially reserved for the left. The difference between Stalinism and its surrogates, and between Stalinism and other non-viable social formations (such as fascism and theocracy in Iran) is that Stalinism evolved out of the defeat of world-wide social revolution. Whilst control over the product was seized from them, the workers retained a limited control over the labour process in an individualised and atomised form.

Brute force is a limited method of extracting a surplus. If the society was to progress beyond the extraction of an absolute surplus, other methods had to be tried. These included workers setting norms and rates of work at the factory level. These measures, however, acted to socialise labour despite the atomization. Throughout the book, therefore, Ticktin stresses that the elite has been conscious of the possibility of its abolition. Its moves and its factionalisation have been motivated by attempts to control, persuade and cajole a working class which is becoming increasingly strong and increasingly threatening. The move to the market is a last ditch attempt to destroy the basis of the potential of workers for social revolution. It is an attempt to destroy the control they have over the labour process. Looked at in this light, developments over the last few years reflect the needs of a desperate and fearful social grouping who are clearly acting as allies of the world bourgeoisie.

Capitalist decline, on the other hand, serves to explain the emergence of social formations which are non-viable and have no potential. Ticktin states that his study is concerned with the laws of transition in a world where the laws of capitalism are in decline but where a new mode of production has yet to come into being. He writes that the 'fundamental law of the transition period is that of the growing contradiction between incipient and often distorted forms of planning and the market' (p.185). Planning is defined as 'the

conscious regulation of the economy by the associated producers themselves' (p.182-183) and the market as 'the sphere of action of the law of value' (p.183). Planning and the market are in contradiction with one another. Every effort is made by the bourgeoisie to keep the market alive and to stop, slow down, or assist the bureaucratic destruction of embryonic planning forms established by workers who take charge of the means of production.

Thus in the USSR, in the early 1920s, there was an attempt to plan at the same time as holding on to elements of the market. This attempt was still-born once the revolution was defeated world-wide. The logic would have entailed opening the USSR to capital investment from the West. This proved impossible for political and economic reasons. The reparations would have been immense, and the West was in a slump and could not afford to reinvest. Stalinism emerged out of the degeneration of the law of value and of the law of planning in the late twenties. It became a system without value and without planning. It had its own peculiar contradictory laws. These Ticktin calls the law of organisation and the law of self interest.

The Contradiction within Use Value.

Ticktin defines a law as 'a description of the process of movement of the poles of a contradiction' (p.118) and defines contradiction 'in its Hegelian and Marxist sense' as 'a necessary relation between opposites that interpenetrate and change each other' (p.13). The two opposite poles within Stalinism are derived from a contradiction within use value. Ticktin uses various terms to describe the contradiction. In the introductory chapter he states that it lies between a 'real' use value and a 'potential' use value. The example he gives is of a jacket with one arm shorter than another: 'it has a real use value; but the use value is less than that of a jacket with two arms of the same length' (p.12). Later he writes: 'A jacket is a jacket but a jacket with one arm shorter than the other may or may not be said to be a jacket' (p.134). Thus it is questionable whether a use value is a use value in the Stalinist system. It is possible to imagine a society in which there is production intended for need but in which every product is useless. Within Stalinism there is a massive production of goods of such poor quality that they are as good as useless.

Ticktin describes the contradiction in various ways. For example, he sometimes describes it as lying between a real use value and an 'apparent' use value (p.127). At other times he describes it as lying between a real use value and an 'imagined or intended' use value. This difference of usage would appear to be necessary to make the connection between the contradiction within the product and the contradictions within the system. Both are clearly related. The one causes the other and vice versa. Ticktin quite clearly wants to connect the two yet never quite gets round to stating the logical relationship explicitly.

The clue to the relationship between the two levels of contradiction - within the product and within the system - is to be found in the following statement: 'The contradiction within the product is then between the administered form of the product and its use value' (p.134). Consideration of the administered form of the product leads directly to the means of social control: atomization and bureaucratic dependency. The fact is that labour power is expended in such a way that it is useless both to the individual worker and to society as a whole. Ticktin makes this connection clear when he writes that '...behind the administered product form lies a form of control over labour' and 'the imagined performance of labour power is one thing, its actual utility is another' (p.137).

The contradiction within the use value of the product is now derived from its administered form. This in turn reflects the contradiction in labour power. Workers alienate their labour power in a way that satisfies neither their own interests (because workers have no control over the product or over society) nor the interests of the

elite (because the elite has no control over the labour process and only limited control over the surplus product). It follows that the 'fundamental contradiction of the Soviet system lies in the form of control over the workers, through their atomization' (p.117). It is in the interest of the workers to remove this form of social control. This can go two ways. On the one hand, they might accept a form of control based on the market, with mass unemployment functioning as a reserve army of labour in return for wages which function as money and can buy commodities. On the other, they might reject all forms of control and express a desire for a full expression of democratic control over the products they make. If they take the latter road, then the contradictions within use value are abolished and the real and imagined character of needs are expressed in a social unity instead of standing in an antagonistic relationship to one another.

Organisation and Self-Interest.

The law of self-interest that Ticktin sees as operating within the Stalinist system has two opposing poles: the atomised worker and socialised labour. The atomised worker can therefore be understood as the actual use value of labour power within the system. The atomised worker has no interest in producing a non-defective use value. From the point of view of the elite, the labour power of the atomised worker is defective because it does not produce a surplus they can appropriate. It is therefore in the interest of the elite to try to socialise labour towards this end. Socialised labour, on the other hand, expresses the potential or imagined use value of labour power. This can only produce non-contradictory use values if it bursts through its atomised fetters and becomes a democratic collectivity which plans not only for the needs of the particular individual but universally - for the needs of every individual. The more labour is socialised, the more it becomes apparent that the interest of workers is to gain control of the surplus.

The two opposing poles of the law of organisation, on the other hand, are central control and the interests of the elite. To repeat, the interest of the elite is to gain complete control over the labour process. They try to do this through centralised control. The centrally controlled worker, however, is atomised and prevents the elite gaining real control. The more they attempt to control, the more defective use values are produced. Economic and social units express the interests of their unit by acting independently from central control. This makes for an increasingly defective surplus product and a gradual disintegration of the economy. The elite nurtures a utopian desire for a market with no centralised controls but attempts impose it through centralised controls. As a result, the process of disintegration speeds up.

The above account of Ticktin's theory of the laws of the system is extrapolated from various sections of the book. The relationship between the contradictions in use value and the laws which govern Stalinism are not obvious. The reason for this is that the discussions of atomization, use value and law take place in different chapters and appear, at times, unrelated.

A good example of this is chapter seven, 'The Nature of the Soviet Political Economy'. In the section on the laws and contradictions of the system, Ticktin mentions the phenomenon of waste as a category and refers also to the difference between actual and potential output. However, he refrains from any explicit discussion of the relationship between the laws, and the contradictions in use value he examines elsewhere. It may be that he thinks that the discussion on waste in chapter two is a sufficient introduction. If so,

it would have done no harm to remind the reader of this in the later chapter. If, moreover, he intended the chapter to stand on its own as an independent essay, it would have been helpful if he had made these relationships more explicit and shown how the contradictory laws of the system can be derived from the contradictions within the product and vice versa.

Disintegration, Decline, and Terminal Crisis.

Ticktin argues, further, that workers in the USSR will move to the left as they realise that the market cannot be introduced without a deeper deterioration in their standard of living - as attempts are made by the elite to stifle demands for democracy being communicated from within the work-place to the whole of society. This argument about the impossibility of introducing the market is based on a broader theory of capitalist decline. Because there is a lot of confusion over the meaning of this category it is necessary to spell it out in more detail.

Some people seem to think that to say that capitalism is in decline is to say that it is facing a terminal crisis. This is not so. Ticktin keeps the two concepts distinct. Stalinism is undoubtedly in terminal crisis and disintegration is the form of this crisis. By disintegration Ticktin means the 'pulling apart of the poles of the system, so that the social groups, factions, and economic categories stand in opposing and noncooperating forms' (p.14). If there is any slogan to be found in his book it is the constant re-iteration that *there is no third way*. Either the market or socialism will burst through the disintegrating system. A terminal crisis for capitalism would be analogous to the events leading up to the 1917 revolution. There is no indication that such a terminal crisis is likely in the immediate future in the absence of a coherent left.

Decline is a completely different idea. Ticktin's view is that the 'decline of capitalism involves the decline of its fundamental law and social relation; it is therefore the decline of the law of value itself' (p.173). The discussion then becomes one about value, abstract labour, money, capital and the market. Ticktin draws attention to the rise of a needs based sector, the growth of monopolies and corresponding lack of competition as evidence of this decline. He also mentions the higher capital-labour ratio requiring long term investment before a return of profits, the management of capitalist economies by their governments, the short term investment policy of finance capital and the rise of bureaucracy.

The consequences for disintegrating Stalinism are threefold. Firstly there can be no proper introduction of a functioning reserve army of labour if it does not function properly under capitalism. Secondly, there can be no internal competition of firms if utilities such as transport, housing, health and education remain in the state or a monopoly sector, and if, even in manufacturing, industries are handed over to cartels. He writes that the system needs 'not just competition but a raging competition to re-establish capitalism with all its controls over the workers' (p.175). Thirdly, finance capital will not be interested in investing in the system 'because it demands quick returns and so does not permit investment that provides profits only over a long time span' (p.167).

The policy of the elite is to introduce the market 'with an iron fist' (p.164). Ticktin argues that this policy has failed. Yet at one point he states: 'Ultimately the market will burst through in spite of the forces holding it back, but it will be in an explosive form' (p.170).



The Zero century. The Fool before an abyss. The century of crises. (20th century).



This statement appears to contradict the general thrust of his argument. It implies that labour power will take the form of value; that money, capital and abstract labour will come into being and that the policy of the elite will be successful. It is the only statement of its kind. Ticktin was writing this book in 1990 when it was not clear that the liberal section of the elite would take power. It is possible to interpret this statement in hindsight as a prediction of what has in fact happened. In this sense, 'the market' has already burst through explosively. In which case his use of the word 'market' is ambiguous, referring both to a mature entity and to its parasitic and decadent offspring: the black market and the mafia.

Nationalism in the USSR.

This book does not give much attention to the rise of nationalism or to the position of women and of the peasantry in the USSR. The reason for this is to do with publication pressures and Ticktin apologises in the preface for these omissions. It is possible, however, to construct his views on nationalism from various references he makes in the book. Events have, of course, gone beyond the scope of the book: war with the Ukraine is being discussed in some circles in Russia and elsewhere, and the ghost of Yugoslavia haunts the East as a warning of the failure of 'market socialism' and a dire premonition of the future. Nevertheless enough information can be gleaned from the book to serve as the foundation of a theory of nationalism that has contemporary relevance.

Nationalism is understood to be 'interclass or intergroup' (p.23). It is the doctrine most likely to appeal to the intelligentsia as the system disintegrates and their position becomes increasingly unstable. The intelligentsia include 'all those who both alienate their labour power and assist in the process of extraction of the surplus product, usually by being in charge of others' (p.75). This intermediate group roughly corresponds to all those with a higher education. It is the most insecure group in the system. The intelligentsia tend to think of workers as 'cattle' and are pre-disposed to anti-semitism and nationalism. As the system disintegrates the standard of living of members of the intelligentsia will decline. They will fluctuate between a dependence on the working class and on the elite. Some no doubt will form part of an emergent left as they start to identify themselves with the working class. Others who ally with the elite will intensify their hatred for workers and Jews and will try to whip up general discontent into patriotic fervour.

War is an option for this layer. But war between Russia and the Ukraine will not be favoured by that section of the elite desperate for stability. Nor will it be favoured by the bourgeoisie in the West. It would be an admission of the fact that the attempt to introduce

money and the market had failed. Moreover, it might speed up the process of the working class moving to the left. War is a high risk strategy. That does not mean, of course, that it will not happen. Compounding the despair, misery and fear that already exists with a good dose of mass slaughter might serve the interests of a small determined faction for a while.

Conclusion.

To reiterate, this is an important book for any honest enquirer into the nature of Stalinism. It is difficult to imagine that it will be superseded until it has been translated into Russian and Ukrainian and forms part of the internal critical debate that is already under way on the prospect of the reforms. It is the development of critical thought within the intelligentsia and the working class that the elite most fears and it is a process they are powerless to prevent. As Ticktin states:

'Indeed, whatever the reforms may be, there can be no hope whatsoever of their success if there cannot be a critical discussion of their progress. This problem, however, is insuperable because any real discussion must come up against the nature of socialism itself - with the majority controlling, work become humanity's prime want, interchangeability of occupations within the division of labour, and hence the abolition of the elite itself' (p.80).

Books Received

Freddie Bayer - *Ecstatic Incisions: The Collages of Freddie Bayer*, AK Press, 1992, ISBN 1-873176-60-0

Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, & Kosmas Psychopedis (eds) - *Open Marxism; Vol I; Dialectics and History*, Pluto Press, 1992, ISBN 0-1453-0590-3

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Society as a stadium

Vincenzo Ruggiero

During the 1990 World Cup, I was in Turin, Italy, and was expecting English friends to visit. We had planned to watch the Brazil side, which was based in Turin for the first tournament. I was able to host one of them in my flat, but had to provide accommodation for others. Well, I had to ring several hotels before getting English customers accepted. The argument which reassured the frightened hotel manager was that those English were black.

The feelings created by football are not only powerful among the supporters, they affect side observers as well. Sometimes these feelings seem to follow an idiosyncratic logic, whereas other times they appear to mirror commonly shared attitudes found in society as a whole. In the above episode, the Italians, who like other Europeans, are generally not particularly benevolent towards black immigrants, somehow suspended their day-to-day sentiments. The blacks, be they supporters of Cameroon, Brazil, Costa Rica, or even England, were preferable to pale, blonde, beer-soaked youths. My friends took an extra precaution, as they wore green and gold T-shirts, thus posing as and mixing with the beloved Brazilians who flocked the streets.

Research on football hooliganism has been conducted in a number of European countries, but unresolved controversies remain with regard to the sources and methodology utilised. Each researcher seems to claim a higher degree of credibility for their material with respect to others, in a contest where the willingness to contact, talk to and observe the supporters at first hand is deemed to be crucial. 'Insufficiently detailed empirical data' is the criticism that one levels at the other. Those who usually boast the unparalleled veracity of their material are also those who implicitly seem to affirm: we are one of the lads!

I suggest that it is important to analyse the impact of football on society in general, and vice versa the impact of 'society in general' on football. Continuities may emerge between the two which are surprisingly meaningful.

I believe two main factors emerge when observing the relationship between football supporters and the general public. The first can be called an 'imitative factor'. This also arises when analysing hooliganism. Think of the behaviour of the supporters of England in Germany, where the finals of the European Championship took place a few years ago. They were symbolically mimicking, in the arena available to them, behaviours and attitudes which were prevalent in the official society. Incitements to show national pride and the notorious urge to 'rejoice' were taken at face value by the supporters. They saw their acts of 'conquering a territory' as being consistent with the general climate which loomed in their country during the Falklands war.

Examples of the imitative factor are easily found in places where traditionally rival communities cohabit. The Catholic-Protestant

frictions in Liverpool and Glasgow are but the two best known instances of how social conflicts are mirrored by the two rival teams in each town. Looking at Italy, other striking examples can be provided. Here, the North-South divide has recently made a disquieting return. The obsessive hatred with which the Naples team is received in the North resonates with the subtle violence displayed in the official discourse of newly formed separatist leagues in the same area of the country. When Naples plays in affluent Milan, they are taunted with the same slogans and the grotesque hymns composed by the Lombard League for its political propaganda. Bergamo and Verona, probably the wealthiest towns in Italy, are the most inhospitable to the Southerners. When the teams of Bari, Naples, and even Rome play there, banners are displayed that echo common accusations against the South. Laziness and the Mafia are the favoured topics both in and outside the stadium. Unemployment becomes an insult hurled at the rival supporters, who 'deserve it' and 'choose it'. In Verona, the local supporters salute their unwealthy counterparts of the South by waving swastikas and 100,000 lira notes.

This feud caused interesting repercussions during the World Cup. The Argentinean team was abusively received in all the Italian cities of the North because Maradona, a Naples player, was in it. In Naples, in turn, the local spectators applauded Argentina, and in overt dissent from the predominant stereotype they welcomed the English supporters with a gigantic warm banner. The second factor which informs the relationship between football and the general public is called a 'sewer factor'. This definition need not sound offensive to the supporters. It only alludes to the fact that the football world recap-

tures values and ideas that have been apparently discarded by the official society. Think of Italy again, where a high geographical mobility has long ago suspended town parochialism, and sexual roles and discrimination had been subjected to violent criticism during the innovative 1960s and 1970s. Well, the football world collects parochialism and machismo before they are definitively dumped. These 'cultural items' are kept alive because, in a sense, they have not completely exhausted their social function. They are revived by football and offered back to society, where the provision of new, alternative values is faced with difficulties. In the relative vacuum, those old values still prove useful as sources of identity.

The 'imitative factor' in football gives society a reflection of itself. In this respect it would be intriguing to explain why staunch German and Dutch players are bought by Italian teams based in the North, and imaginative Argentines and Brazilians by those based in the South. Do fans identify themselves with the respective characteristics of their stars? In 'Calvinist' Turin, for example, the supporters of Juventus appreciate the defensive and undaring style of their team. There, the final score is more important than the spectacle. The city, its team and supporters seem to have a lot in common. By the same token, when we witness violent confrontations between rival supporters, we should be wondering: My God, haven't we got something in common with them?

The 'sewer factor' allows the return of such values which, in the face of social development, we regard as redundant. However, like recycled refuse, they still prove useful. After all, isn't garbage used for the production of new alternative energy?

* 5074 EONTA

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Poll Tax Rebellion

George Gordon

Poll Tax Rebellion

by Danny Burns, (AK Press/Attack International 1992)

It has to be said that this is a very useful book. As well as reviving many happy memories for class struggle militants it provides a valuable record of the events which led to the defeat of the poll tax. I don't know of any other publication which does this with the same level of honesty and accuracy. It would be particularly useful for giving to comrades from other countries who want to know about this high point in the class struggle in Britain. In particular, Chapter 3 provides an excellent description of the self-organisation of anti-poll tax groups where people lived - this was the most important aspect of the struggle. Its politics are generally of the wishy-washy libertarian variety but I'm not going to condemn it just because it doesn't call for the dictatorship of the proletariat at the end of every paragraph. Its overall tone is very "reasonable" while at the same time making quite a few hard-hitting points about the need for the working class to organise outside the labour movement. It also calls for the extension of the non-payment tactic - something which is particularly relevant given the recent announcement of the imposition of VAT on fuel bills.

I was seriously involved in the anti-poll tax movement in London from late 1989 so much of the stuff about the development of the struggle in England was already familiar but even for me there is plenty of thought-provoking and encouraging information. For example, I'd never heard about attempts by Bristol city council to collect the tax through local shops. This failed after consumer boycotts and physical attacks on the premises (p.65). I learnt a lot from the section about the origins of the movement in Scotland. This provided an interesting example of how people often act ahead of their ideas

given that many of the first "Anti-Poll Tax Unions" (APTUs) were set up by people with pronounced Scottish nationalist sympathies. This didn't stop resistance to the poll tax in Scotland (particularly to the Sheriff's Officers, i.e. bailiffs) being an enormous inspiration to anti-poll tax activists in England and Wales. If anything the anti-poll tax struggle will have weakened Scottish and English nationalism (let's hope so!).

Non-sectarian

Danny Burns (DB) understands the difference between civil disobedience (the middle classes demanding to be arrested) and resistance (proles being determined to break the law and get away with it). He's also good at describing how the class struggle has lots of different elements to it: violent/non-violent; legal/illegal; "individual"/"mass", and that these are not mutually exclusive. This last point is argued explicitly in the concluding chapter ("After the Poll Tax") although, it has to be said, it isn't argued too well. He says "the actions of those who were not prepared to break the law were not undermined by the actions of the few who chose to throw fire bombs". This is true but it conveniently ignores the fact that the actions of people lobbing fire bombs into poll tax and bailiffs' offices certainly were undermined by certain people in local APTUs who went to the press "dissociating" the movement from these actions. He continues: "those who chose to leave Trafalgar Square peacefully, were not tarnished by those who chose to fight back against the police attack". Again, this is true but it ignores the fact that it would have been better for those of us fighting the police if more people had stayed around rather than heading for their coaches as the stewards directed.

This is indicative of a central weakness of the book - the way it bends over backwards to be non-sectarian, taking the view that anyone involved in the anti-poll tax movement was basically OK. This obscures real conflicts that went on within the organised movement - between pro and anti-Labour Party forces, between those who really wanted the struggle to succeed and those who wanted to subordinate it to their political ambitions (notably *Militant*), between those who wanted to take the struggle into workplaces and the union hacks who didn't, between those who thought the Trafalgar Square uprising was "fucking brilliant" and those who thought it was an embarrassment. This weakness is expressed most clearly where he describes the comments made by Tommy Sheridan (Chair of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation) immediately after Trafalgar Square as "defensive" (p.104). In this statement Sheridan denounced the rioters. The next day he and Steve Nally were to say that they intended to "name names" and "root out the trouble-makers". This was to earn them the well-deserved epithets of "Nally the Nark" and "Shop'Em Sheridan". There was nothing defensive about the remarks made by these gentlemen. They

indicated a real desire go on the offensive... against the proletariat! In a similar vein he describes the All-Britain Federation's "People's March Against the Poll Tax" as an "inadequate response" (p.116). This consisted of a few dozen *Militant* supporters (OK, one or two weren't) in expensive track suits marching to London from various parts of the country. It was *Militant*'s response to widespread demands for more demos in London after Trafalgar Square. To call it "inadequate" is to mask the fact that it was an attempt to demobilise the movement.

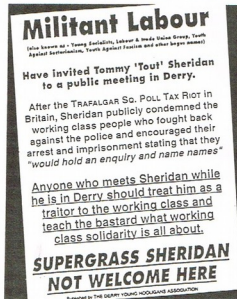
In general DB puts forward the need to organise *outside* the labour movement but not *against* it. In practice this doesn't matter too much in community based struggles - in many cases it is possible to simply avoid leftist manipulators (e.g. by setting up alternative local groups to the *Militant*-dominated ones). Even here, though, important political choices must be made. For example, do we lobby a council meeting (as, of course, Labour Party types want to do) or do we disrupt it? In workplace struggles this is a much more important issue. Workplaces where there is a tradition of militancy will tend to have strong unions which cannot be ignored, they must be fought. This did happen to some extent, albeit on a completely informal level. I remember hearing about a union rep. telling a group of nurses that they couldn't hold an anti-poll tax meeting in their hostel without permission from the union (COHSE). He was told to get stuffed and that the meeting was "nothing to do with the union anyway". DB certainly understands that the unions hindered the anti-poll tax struggle - p.164 contains an important piece of information about how the UCW (Union of Communication Workers) tried to suppress the group "Postal Workers Against the Poll Tax". For DB, though, this was just an "organisational problem".

Crime

"If you tell people to break the law by not paying the tax, you're not far off telling them to break other laws as well".

Norman Tebbit, Tory Party Chairman, 2.6.90

I feel I must object strongly to DB's insulting characterisation of poll tax non-payers as honest law abiding citizens (p.50). It's probably true that most regarded themselves as such. Whether they actually were is another matter. According to the Home Office, a third of men in Britain will have been convicted of a "serious" criminal offence by the age of thirty. On p.183 DB says "millions of people broke the law for the first time" - I very much doubt it! As we all know, millions of proletarians supplement their incomes by illegal or semi-illegal means, whether it's non-payment of various bills, TV license evasion, theft from work, fiddling the dole or whatever. The prevailing attitude to these activities, however, is one of individualism - if I do it and get caught it's my problem; if you get caught it's your problem, "if you can't do the time, don't do the crime". Many people



Poster produced by Irish anarchists, which shows the bitterness created by *Militant* tactics

will do these things without even telling their closest friends or relatives that they're doing it. One of the positive things about the anti-poll tax movement is that non-payment was a typical form of working class law-breaking which became socially acceptable and was seen as completely legitimate. People were prepared to say "I'm proud to be a poll tax non-payer" whereas they wouldn't (yet) say "I'm proud to be a shoplifter". The bosses' austerity measures will, without any doubt, drive millions of people (deeper) into crime. The anti-poll tax movement could be the beginning of the politicisation of the criminals. It's become normal for bourgeois commentators to talk about a "culture of non-payment" which will undermine any form of local taxation. In particular, I think that bailiffs threatening to come to your house is a nerve-racking experience for most people. But when it's happened once and you've successfully kept them out, or they've never turned up as frequently happens, it's a very confidence building experience. This is particularly true in Scotland where there was mass resistance to bailiffs in the form of large crowds gathering outside threatened houses. We'll see what happens when they start harassing Council Tax non-payers.

As revolutionaries we know that it's pointless to try to use the law to serve the interests of the proletariat. We also know that a good lefty lawyer can often keep you out of prison. The price you pay for not going to prison is that of legitimising the legal system - the right of the police to make arrests and the right of the courts to jail "guilty" people. Given the present level of class struggle it's hard to imagine what it would mean for there to be a large-scale refusal to play the game of capitalist legality. The anti-poll tax movement did, however, give us an inkling of what can happen. One strategy used by almost all anti-poll tax groups was to encourage people to turn up for their Liability Order hearings in order to "clog up the courts". This strategy worked for a few months. Eventually, though, the councils got most of the liability orders they needed. But it didn't do them any good! The courts generated a mountain of liability orders (millions of the things!) but these pieces of paper had no practical meaning. There were too few bailiffs and they didn't know how to operate in conditions of widespread hostility. With the Committal (potential imprisonment) hearings it was obvious to almost everyone involved in the anti-poll tax movement that the best advice was not to go to court. Most of those summonsed to these hearings didn't go. Warrants were issued for their arrest and ... nothing much happened in most cases. At the present time there must be tens of thousands of these "fugitives from justice" at large in Britain. "Legal advice" was an important part of the struggle but as things progressed the nature of the advice given was less and less legalistic and more just along the lines of "millions of us are getting away with it, why shouldn't you?". With the benefit of hindsight the whole "have your day in court" strategy can be seen to have been a waste of time. In the end the argy bargy over whether the state would allow "McKenzie Friends" (informal legal advisers with no right to address the court) proved irrelevant to the class struggle. Magistrate's courts were sometimes disrupted, rather than being used as a

tribune for denouncing the poll tax, but this was almost never a declared aim of anti-poll tax groups. In the end the instinctive policy of complete non-participation in the bourgeois courts proved to be the right one.

Trafalgar Square

As with the rest of the book, DB's account of the Trafalgar Square uprising and the police repression which followed it provides much valuable information. The main problem with it is that it is very much oriented towards the events in Trafalgar Square itself - there is almost nothing about the widespread trashing of bourgeois property throughout the West End which followed. Partly this is just because Trafalgar Square is where Danny was most of the time, as is obvious from his account. Partly, I suspect, it's ideological as well. By concentrating on the Square itself he can emphasise the defensive aspects of the struggle. It's true that the police attacked us first and that most of our activity in the Square was defensive... and very inspiring. It's certainly the only demo I've ever been on where I've seen police snatch squads try to break up a crowd and totally fail to do so! But even here we did many things that were more *offensive*, like collectively deciding to attack the South African embassy and then doing so (not very successfully, it's very well fortified), like wrecking an army recruiting office and looting an off-licence (this did have the unfortunate effect of many demonstrators being the worse for drink when a clear head was required to fight the police). None of these events are mentioned in the book. Nor does he say that the main reason so many rioters were arrested after the demo is that so few of them *covered their faces* during the uprising. This is a vital lesson which I am sure DB must be aware of. It's downright irresponsible not to mention it.

DB repeats the well-worn liberal cliché that the police deliberately set out to provoke a riot (p.100). Perhaps they did but they were obviously completely unprepared for the scale of our response. It's more likely that they were expecting a peaceful middle class stroll like the CND demos of the early 1980s but then realised (too late) that without a massive police presence and effective stewarding it's impossible to assemble 200,000 proletarians in central London without a major confrontation with bourgeois property relations ensuing. For a more balanced view of events I would direct the reader to the pamphlet *Poll Tax Riot - 10 Hours That Shook Trafalgar Square* (Acab Press, BM 8884, London WC1N 3XX) which contains several first-hand accounts.

On p.116 DB says:

"Often attack is the only effective form of defence and, as a movement, we should not be ashamed or defensive about these actions, we should be proud of those who did fight back."

Fair enough, Danny, but shouldn't we be doing more than just feeling proud of these people...? Like organising effective measures in advance for next time the pigs attack us? The anti-poll tax movement certainly organised illegal support for arrested demonstrators, mostly through the TSDC (Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign, described in the book), but there was almost no attempt made to organise

physical defence of demos. Any suggestions at "official" Federation-run meetings that this should be done were very quickly sat on by *Militant* hacks (in particular one Mr. Wally Kennedy) who quite openly stated that march stewards should "protect" demonstrators by handing trouble-makers over to the police! More subtly, the TSDC tended to function as a means of turning class struggle militants into "legal liaison volunteers" rather than rioters.

One final point about Trafalgar Square. Am I the only revolutionary to be irritated by the description of the targets of our anger on that fateful day in March 1990 as "symbols of wealth"? There's nothing symbolic about a car showroom filled with top of the range BMWs. This is capitalist wealth (even if it's not "means of production").

Conclusion

In DB's conclusion on the last page of the book he says that the community "will remain, for some time, the strongest base for political action". I can certainly imagine "community" based struggles (mass non-payment and resistance to evictions, for example) being very important in Britain in the next few years. Part of the reason for the success of the anti-poll tax movement was the complete absence of any community equivalent of a trade union bureaucracy, but this doesn't mean that leftists (such as *Militant*) won't try to create one. DB's book is useful in pointing out many positive aspects of the anti-poll tax movement and how it achieved its immediate aim but to really "learn the lessons" we need to look more closely at the forces that stopped it from going further.

I'll leave you with one final thought. Just what did we win in fighting the poll tax? I would suggest that the main concession made by the state was not the formal abolition of the tax itself but the fact that the state effectively gave up trying to collect it without, of course, ever admitting to such a thing. There was (and is) a *de facto* amnesty for non-payers in most of the country. This may have cost the state about a billion pounds or so in lost arrears. This is not so serious when you consider that the overall cost to the bourgeoisie's economic plans was more like £10 billion, mostly in the costs of administrative reorganisation involved in abolishing the poll tax and introducing yet another completely new one. The advantage of this unannounced concession is that the mass of non-payers carried on not paying but didn't become organised or politicised, the mass of people who were paying carried on paying and the activists didn't have much to be active about. Once it was realised that working class homes were not going to be besieged by SAS-style squads of bailiffs and the police were not going to kick pensioners doors in and drag them off to prison the local groups gradually disintegrated. What this shows is that although the poll tax represented a major break with the post war social democratic consensus (which is part of the reason it aroused such widespread opposition, even from sections of the middle classes who benefited from it financially), in retreat the state was still able to make use of a social democratic type of strategic concession designed to preempt any proletarian class formation.

Critical Unrealism

David Gorman

A Meeting of Minds: Socialists discuss philosophy - towards a new symposium

Roy Bhaskar (ed), foreword by Roy Edgley. Published by the Socialist Society for The Socialist Movement, ISBN 1 872481 10 8, £3.95.

Edited and mainly written by Roy Bhaskar, this short book seeks to explore the relation between Bhaskar's critical realist philosophy and the political project of socialist emancipation. Its real importance, however, is that it constitutes a statement of the philosophico-political project of the grouping that calls itself The Socialist Movement. For this reason alone it deserves serious attention.

In the first two chapters, which outline Bhaskar's critical realism and its political applications, a form of critical realism is advocated, one which, it is argued, underpins the politics of socialist emancipation. Critical realism, it is claimed, penetrates below superficial surface appearances to reveal enduring structures and generative mechanisms. Critical realism stresses what it sees as the 'transformative nature' of social activity and a 'relational' conception of society. Social systems are, from this point of view, intrinsically open and so essentially subject to the possibility of transformation. It is this that makes socialism possible. Socialism itself is seen as the result, not of the amelioration of states of affairs within a given social structure, but of the actual transformation of those structures. This in turn underlies the opposition of Bhaskar and his comrades to post-1945 social-democratic government and to stalinism.

The critical realist view appears to start off on the right track, stressing the historical nature of all social institutions, the market included. It is argued, for example that the market is not natural or given but socially and historically specific. From this, however, the conclusion is drawn that market relations are compatible with human emancipation: 'Emancipatory socialist action will involve transforming the market - more precisely, abolishing some mar-

kets, socialising and democratising others' (p.30). Rejecting the 'market-socialism' of Alec Nove and the 'market-less socialism' of Ernest Mandel, Bhaskar *et al* opt for the 'socialised market' proposed by Diane Elson (in *New Left Review* 172, Nov-Dec 1988).

A political project that is essentially uncritical of the value form must be rejected but it is necessary to be clear on what grounds. What is needed is not a merely abstract dismissal of the conclusions reached - the 'socialised market' - but criticism of the premises from which these conclusions arise. This is no easy task for these premises include ones that many communists would share. Politically, the acceptance of the 'socialised market' flows from rejection of stalinist and social democratic administration. But it has theoretical roots as well. The argument for the 'socialised market' starts off from the legitimate concern to reject all 'reified' conceptions of the market. It is argued that the market is neither natural nor given and nor is it unchanging. The market has taken on different forms at different times in history and in different societies. And as an empirical observation, it must be conceded that this is true. Bhaskar's political conclusions cannot be refuted by appeal to the unchanging nature of the market. More than that, however, Bhaskar's concern to reject all 'reified' conceptions of the market has a resonance with the concerns of those writers in *Radical Chains* who have opposed the 'naturalisation' of the laws of capital (see Dixon and Gorman in *Radical Chains* 3).

There is here a resonance but also a dissonance. The two projects meet and also part. Bhaskar and the other philosophers of The Socialist Movement are critical of the reification of 'the market' and conclude that the market can be 'socialised'. For those writers who have taken up the question in *Radical Chains*, by contrast, the concern has been to understand how the laws of capital have been transformed by and have in turn transformed conscious activity. From this follows the need to abolish the value form and all surrogates for it. The Socialist Movement philosophers derive their categories from sociology and economics and not from the critique of political economy. Where the *Radical Chains* project is concerned

with the understanding of a system or totality of interlocking social relations, Bhaskar and company see instead a mere aggregation or collection of relations that are subject to an open set of permutations. This can be seen in Bhaskar's description of the socialised market: 'It involves public ownership and worker-managed enterprises with a basic wage guaranteed irrespective of work, in exchange for domestic or caring labour, with labour, producer goods and the consumer goods markets, subject to over-all planning norms and with market-making undertaken by publicly funded bodies and backed up by buyer-seller information networks' (p.28-29).

The Socialist Movement wants to abolish the market in capital but retain the market in labour. At the same time, however, it wants to guarantee a basic wage 'irrespective of work'. How is the circle to be squared? A socialist project that wants to retain the labour market does not anticipate the emancipation of human activities, needs, and desires from external discipline. It has, in fact, no conception of real human emancipation. A 'basic wage guaranteed irrespective of work' is, however, incompatible with money mediation, the discipline of the law of value. If needs can be met without recourse to wage labour people will not exchange their labour power for a wage. To this extent the law of value is partially suspended. Yet in so far as society is still subject to the pressure of the law of value, to the extent that there is still a market in labour power, people must be forced to work. Administrative structures will proliferate as the socialist regime strives to make the recognition of needs compatible with the discipline of the law of value.

If the regime is not to succumb to crisis, the extent of needs recognition will have to be reduced. Necessarily the socialist regime comes into opposition to the class of producers. If this sounds familiar it is only because it replicates, at a higher level of decay, the inadequacies of the social democratic project that it rejects. It replicates the inadequacies of that project and also takes over its language and categories. The references to 'over-all planning norms' and 'publicly funded bodies', 'public ownership and worker-managed enterprises' indicate the degree of dependence on previous outmoded projects. Planning is equated with the activities of the organisers of labour and not with the activity and subjectivity of the producers themselves. The project does not point to the future but appears to try to salvage the wreckage of the past. The philosophers of The Socialist Movement are unable to identify class subjects with a potential for self-emancipation and thus cannot conceive of the transcendence of value relations. Thus they are condemned to become, if anything, the guardians of absolute poverty in decline. Market relations and the laws of capital are subject to change and transformation but the possibilities are not endless. At some point the questions of power and supersession must and will be posed.

If the first two chapters are devoted to outlining



ing the basic ideas of critical realism and their application, chapters three to five examine the relative merits also of critical theory and postmodernism. This takes the form of a debate between Roy Bhaskar, William Outhwaite and Kate Soper. Bhaskar's contribution consists of a critique of Habermas (the representative of critical theory) and of Rorty (who represents postmodernism). The form of this critique is very much apparent but its content is elusive. For Bhaskar, Habermas 'remains ensnared in the antinomy of transcendental pragmatism'. He 'tacitly inherits a positivist ontology and an instrumentalist-manipulative conception' of the natural sciences and the sphere of labour (p.34). Habermas's system 'readily takes on a dualistic overly anti-naturalist hue' while Rorty 'remains wedded to a positivist account of the natural sciences'. Rorty, moreover, 'erects a Nietzschean superstructure (as a superidealist "epistemology") in the guise of an undifferentiated "linguistic monism on a Humean-Hempelian ontological base" (p.35).

This is a lot of '-isms' and '-eans' to be crammed into less than two pages of text. It is not, however, the result of trying to distill the essence of his longer works into a small space. Readers of Bhaskar's weightier tomes, *The Possibility of Naturalism*, for example, will have noticed the same tendency at work there. The suspicion is that the adjectives - 'positivist', 'Nietzschean', 'superidealist', and so on - are doing all the work. They are surrogates for real argument. What exactly is a 'dualist overly anti-naturalist hue'? How would you recognise a 'superidealist epistemology' if you encountered one? Bhaskar would seem to presuppose more knowledge on the part of the reader than could be deemed to be reasonable. Perhaps he could have provided a glossary, or better, an index of -isms.

Yet there is something less than humorous about these procedures. To say that someone's philosophy 'readily takes on a dualistic overly naturalist hue' is not to argue a point but to refuse debate. It is a form of intellectual policing, the outcome of which cannot be a broadening of views or an exchange of ideas. In it, however, there is more than an echo of Stalin's denunciation of the economist I.I. Rubin for 'Menshevizing idealism'.

After all this, Outhwaite's response appears initially as a breath of fresh air, his chapter opening promisingly with an unpretentious attempt to unravel the relation between critical realism and critical theory. This soon degenerates into an attempt to show that Bhaskar and Habermas have more in common than is normally thought. The purpose and relevance of the exercise is unclear.

The most interesting of the last three chapters is Soper's discussion of postmodernism, critical realism and critical theory. Soper identifies postmodernism as a response to the experience of fascism, stalinism and what she describes as the 'nuclear age and looming ecological crisis' (p.43). These, she argues, have generated doubt, scepticism and a questioning of Enlightenment rationality and conceptions of progress. These real concerns are expressed in the postmodern consciousness. Yet, with postmodernism, conceived not just as a form of social consciousness but as a philosophical project, these legitimate concerns are subjected to a kind of 'theoretical

overdrive'. In the end it invites us to 'disown the very aspiration to truth as something unobtainable in principle' (p.45). Thus it degenerates into a total relativism and a form of libertarianism or anarchism 'of distinctly New Rightist overtones' (p.46).

Soper's distinction between postmodernism as a spirit of the age and as an intellectual project is useful. However, while recognising the socio-historical roots of the postmodern consciousness, Soper deals with postmodernism only as an intellectual concern. Thus she appears to think that it can be overcome by showing it to be logically incoherent. But a critique which addresses only the relativism and libertarianism of postmodernism is not sufficient. We need to understand the social processes necessary to the breakdown of the current condition of disorientation and to the emergence of a new rationality. If this cannot be done, then criticism is limited to an essentially conservative reaction, an attempt to restore what is in fact irretrievable.

Soper's predicament, however, highlights a problem that is general. The supposed task of the project seems to be that of rectifying 'the

error of reification' (p.9) or 'illusory or false consciousness' (p.11). It is as if socialist thought develops autonomously of human social relations, that intellectual work is not subject to the same processes that supposedly mystify everyone else. This goes together with a lack of recognition of social subjectivity. Bhaskar says that his contribution is 'part of the longer term project of recapturing the intellectual high ground' (p.7). It is difficult to avoid concluding that he thinks that intellectual hegemony is enough. There is no recognition that individuals must transform society and so transform themselves.

The book is presented as a contribution to the process of socialist 're-thinking' and in particular as a response to the collapse of stalinism in the USSR and Eastern Europe and the weakening of the national liberation movements in the Third World (p.5). Yet the general impression is that the philosophers of The Socialist Movement remain trapped within the old perspectives. There is no real break here with the old practices of administrative intervention and the concern to socialise the market merely echoes the current preoccupations of the Soviet elite.

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Trotsky Reappraised

David Gorman

The Trotsky Reappraisal

Terry Brotherton and Paul Dukes (eds),
Edinburgh University Press, 1992.

Leon Trotsky is undoubtedly one of the most controversial figures of twentieth century marxism. Opinion about him is divided firmly between pro- and anti-, and few seem capable of adopting a neutral attitude towards the man. There cannot be another marxist, other than Stalin, who has inspired so much devotion on the one side, and so much loathing on the other. Clearly, sympathy with Stalin tends to obstruct a positive attitude towards Trotsky and the fact of Trotsky's demonisation by stalinism has only added to, deepened and sustained his clear attraction for many opponents of stalinism. This in itself has induced a polarisation which has obstructed attempts at objective evaluation of his work. It is difficult to discuss the theory of permanent revolution, the law of combined and uneven development, and the analysis of fascism, independently of Stalin's attitude towards them. The mere fact that stalinism treated them as a dangerous heresy, has actually added to their appeal.

But serious discussion of Trotsky has been impeded also by a deep polarisation within the anti-stalinist left itself. Here the split between those pro- and those anti-Trotsky has been reproduced. For some, trotskyism has been the only real opposition to stalinism, while for others there is no real difference. On the one hand there are those who will tolerate no criticism of his views and on the other those who seem to regard him as anathema. If some anti-stalinists have been influenced at least in part by the rabid anti-trotskyism of the stalinists, other anti-stalinists have focused rather on Kronstadt, on the militarisation of labour, and on the destruction of the Makhnovist movement. It would seem that for some anti-stalinists, stalinism is bad but trotskyism is worse. Attacks on Trotsky by many anti-stalinists all too often resemble those by the stalinists themselves.

This circumstance does not encourage change. Rather it reinforces the view that trotskyism is the only principled opposition to stalinism. Significantly, the only serious critical work on Trotsky to have emerged in the last fifty years has come from within the trotskyist movement itself. In many cases, such as those of Victor Serge, Raya Dunayevskaya, and CLR James, criticism has been a prelude to a political and theoretical break with trotskyism but this does not alter the fact that serious criticism has come only from within. In fact the tendency towards iconisation within trotskyism was always uneven in its development and is now clearly breaking down. The real obstacle to dialogue today is the absurd sectarianism of the professional anti-trotskyist.

Trotskyism has persisted at least in part be-

cause stalinism has existed; it has defined itself very much by opposition to stalinism. The ongoing disintegration of stalinism will lead therefore, either to the regeneration of trotskyism, or to its collapse. There are clear signs of both: a new theoretical openness on the one hand, and blind retrenchment on the other. It is within this context that it is possible to evaluate the contents of *The Trotsky Reappraisal*, a collection of papers presented at one of three conferences held in 1990 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of Trotsky. The conference in question, 'Trotsky after fifty years', was held at Aberdeen University in July and August 1990. Anyone who wants to know more about the conference itself should read the review by Baruch Hiron in an earlier issue of this journal ('Fifty Years of the Assassin', *Radical Chains* 2).

Not all of the papers presented at the conference have been included in the book. Nevertheless, the published material addresses a wide range of questions and issues, covering philosophy, history, politics and political economy, and it does so from a variety of perspectives. As one of the editors, Terry Brotherton, notes in his concluding essay: 'No reader could agree with everything in it. The collection is deliberately eclectic' (p.235). Also included is work by several scholars from Eastern Europe and the former USSR, who have been able to study Trotsky since the opening of the archives in the course of *perestroika*.

It is impossible to comment on everything. Instead I want to focus on a series of papers which discuss Trotsky's relation to bolshevism and to Lenin in particular, and the paper by Hillel Ticktin on Trotsky's political economy. Challenging the common view that Trotsky and Lenin agreed on virtually all things at least in the period after the revolution, these papers argue for a clear distinction between Trotsky and mainstream bolshevism. The aim is clearly to try to rescue Trotsky from association with bolshevism. I want to examine their arguments and briefly indicate some problems.

In 'Trotsky and the struggle for "Lenin's Heritage"', Michael Reiman traces Trotsky's changing relation to Lenin in the period after the revolution: from the trade union debate of 1920, through the 'Lenin-Zinoviev coup' at the 10th Party Congress, to the Lenin-Trotsky bloc of 1922. Reiman outlines and explores their arguments and disagreements but never in a sectarian manner. As he himself notes, criticism of Trotsky is necessary but it 'must not proceed from the assumption that in conflicts between Lenin and Trotsky all right and truth lay on one side and all evil and falsehood on the other' (p.50). In exploring these conflicts, and Trotsky's hesitations in his struggle against Stalin, Reiman emphasises Trotsky's late membership of the Bolshevik Party - he joined only after July 1917 - and his consequent marginalisation within it.

Related to this is the question of Trotsky's political individuality and independence. Unlike most of the Bolshevik leaders, Trotsky was not a pupil of Lenin but an independent theorist, the author of the theory of permanent revolution, who had clashed with Lenin on many issues before 1917. When he joined the Bolshevik Party, it was not because he had adopted 'bolshevism', but rather, because Lenin and a few other Bolshevik leaders had adopted a position close to his own on the nature of the revolution. The acceptance of a perspective similar to that of permanent revolution was not universal within the Bolshevik camp even after 1917 - Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin had always rejected it and even opposed the seizure of power in 1917 - and Trotsky remained marginalised. Summing up his argument, Reiman says '...the fundamental charge that history must direct against him [Trotsky] is that, in October 1917, it was Trotsky who to a great extent ensured that victory in the revolution belonged to a party that was not his party and which he did not control. Apart from the initial period of the revolution and the Civil War, the only role open to him was as a critic of this party' (p.51).

The same theme appears also in Udo Gehrman's piece on 'Trotsky and the Russian Social Democratic controversy over comparative revolutionary history'. This article covers much of the ground covered elsewhere by Michael Lowy in *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development* (Verso, 1980). Gehrman's account, however, shows greater scholarship. Its knowledge of the positions of the Russian Revolution is wider - Gehrman discusses not only the positions of Lenin, Trotsky and Plekhanov, but also the views of Axelrod, Lunacharsky, Martov, Martinov, and Tsereteli. In addition Gehrman's account addresses in greater depth the role of the French revolution of 1789 in the ideology of the Russian marxists. The main criticism must be that it accepts the terms of debate as laid down by its subjects thus failing to challenge the notion of the 'bourgeois-democratic revolution', for instance, is there such a beast? Where does the idea come from? The usual source cited is the *Communist Manifesto* but while Marx and Engels distinguish the tasks of the bourgeois revolution from those of the proletarian revolution, no mention is made of there being a 'bourgeois democratic revolution'. Nevertheless, in this Gehrman's failure is no greater than that of anyone else who has written on the subject while his contribution to our knowledge of the period is more valuable.

A third article to examine the question of Trotsky's relation to Lenin is Richard Day's 'The political theory of Leon Trotsky'. Here Day attempts to link Trotsky's understanding of the role of consciousness in history to his political critique of stalinism and the Five Year

Plans. Day situates Trotsky's understanding of consciousness within the dialectical tradition of Hegel and Marx and carefully distances it from Engels, who, he argues, 'helped to create confusion for an entire generation of Marxists' (p.121). Whereas Engels saw consciousness as a 'reflection' of the material world, Day claims that Trotsky, like Marx, stressed the 'active relation of consciousness to the external world' (Trotsky, quoted by Day, p.121). Trotsky's differences with Engels, moreover, 'distinguished him clearly from the mainstream of Bolshevik thought' (p.122). To demonstrate this point Day briefly examines Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Bukharin's *Historical Materialism*, and Stalin's *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*. All of these texts, he argues, had their philosophical roots in Engels and all of them worked with a reflection theory of consciousness. Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, he argues, constituted a break with this tradition and brought Lenin's understanding of the role of consciousness closer to that of Trotsky.

By outlining the philosophical differences between Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, Day seems to reinforce the argument put forward by Reiman. But Day fails to show precisely how Trotsky's philosophical understanding of consciousness informed his politics. He argues that the reflection theory of consciousness held by the Bolsheviks underpinned a view of planning that denied a conscious role for the working class, whereas Trotsky's emphasis on the active role of consciousness led him to argue for the central role of working class activity. Yet many statements can be found where Trotsky identifies consciousness with the party or even the state. Thus in *The Third International after Lenin* (1928) he argued that in a period in which the objective prerequisites for socialism had matured, 'the key to the whole historical process passes into the hands of the subjective factor, that is, the party' (*The Third International Since Lenin*, p.84). Statements like this sit uneasily with Day's claim. A large proportion of Trotsky's work betrays an acceptance of a reflection theory of consciousness that Day believes he rejected. There is here a clear parallel with Lenin. Through his reading of Hegel's *Science of Logic* in 1915 Lenin seems to have discovered a more dialectical view of consciousness; this is clear to anyone who has read his *Conspicuous of Hegel's 'Science of Logic'*. In his more political works of 1916 and 1917, ie. *Imperialism and The State and Revolution*, however, the same mechanical view that informed his earlier works still pervades.

Whatever their shortcomings, the articles by Reiman, Gehrmann and Day do hold out the promise of a more critical understanding of Trotsky's relation to bolshevism. At the very least, they succeed in detaching the question of Trotsky's relation to Lenin from the question of the truth of his views. The two had become linked in the 1920s when Stalin managed to make agreement with Lenin the litmus test of truth and, in order to survive, Trotsky himself had tried to show that he had never had any serious differences with Lenin.

But perhaps the most important article in the book is Hillel Ticktin's 'Trotsky's political economy of capitalism'. This too touches briefly on differences between Trotsky, Lenin,

Bukharin and others, but its main function is to explore various aspects of Trotsky's political economy: the notion of 'the curve of capitalist development', the theory of capitalist decline, Trotsky's conception of the relation of crisis and revolution, his understanding of categories such as 'imperialism', 'fascism' and the 'transitional epoch'. Ticktin has a deep knowledge of Trotsky's writings and the picture that emerges is initially very persuasive. This is particularly true of his account of Trotsky's understanding of capitalist decline. For Ticktin: 'Trotsky's crucial perspective is one of a declining capitalism which was desperately seeking its way out of its old age. At certain periods it was able to find temporary alleviation through imperialism, fascism, war and stalinism/cold war, but the palliatives become ever more useless over time' (p.222).

His account of the category of the transitional epoch has much to recommend it too. In Ticktin's view: 'Trotsky never produced a political economy of the transitional epoch, but it may be pieced together. In the first place, it is a period when capitalism has been overthrown in a part of the world, without the introduction of socialism itself. In the second place, capitalism continues to decline. In the third place, the subjective aspect plays a crucial role as the leaders of both social democracy and stalinism are seen as saving capitalism in this period' (p.225). Subjectivity is crucial to Trotsky's perspective. Ticktin argues that 'Trotsky is the only Marxist theorist to put the subjective into political economy. He stands in stark contrast to theorists like Paul Mattick and Henryk Grossman who in their own ways tend to objectivise economic laws. Capitalism, for them, will come to a natural end... What Trotsky did was to add a new dimension to political economy by arguing that the movement of capital has to be seen as part of the class struggle and not just as an

unconscious movement of rates of profit' (p.218).

Ticktin's interpretation is compelling but it is also open to criticism. Trotsky's political economy is ambiguous but in Ticktin's account these ambiguities are not explored. In his writings of the twenties and thirties Trotsky tended to elide the concept of decline with that of collapse thus producing a political economy which fostered a catastrophist view of the immediate situation. In his discussion of the transitional epoch, moreover, Trotsky tended to separate the subjective from the objective and then, as we have already seen, to identify the 'subjective factor' with the party rather than with the working class. This separation, which found its fullest formulation in the notion of 'the crisis of revolutionary leadership', tended to reinforce the catastrophism inherent in the theory of decline. Trotsky, moreover, identified decline with the chronic disruption of capitalist 'equilibrium', itself an ambiguous and confusing notion, and with the decomposition and collapse of the productive forces. His view was one of the objective development of capital to the point where the contradiction between the productive forces and social relations of capitalism led to collapse and forced the working class to struggle. However, within this objective movement of capital the working class played only a subordinate role. This was the basis for the role of the party as directing organ. The result was a theory of transition that looks more like a description of defeat.

This book contains a wide diversity of material which explores different aspects of Trotsky's contribution from a variety of political perspectives and this review has merely scratched the surface. It is to be hoped, however, that the issues raised in the articles mentioned above will find their way into the trotskyist movement and the wider anti-stalinist movement.



Cartoon from a Soviet satirical magazine (circa 1920), showing Zinoviev, Lenin, Marx, Kamenev, Lozovsky & Chicherin standing, with Radek, Sosnovsky, Trotsky, Riazanov & Bukharin seated.

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too enters working class consciousness. Workers are aware that they are exploited under capitalism but they are also aware that the historically existing "alternatives" do not solve the problem. In so far as the forms of the prevention of communism appear as alternatives, by appearing to be the only possible alternatives, they seem to indicate that there is in fact no alternative.

The prevention of communism permits the nationalised recognition of needs within the wider context of a world market economy, this nationalised recognition of needs being the basis for the global preservation of capital. The law of value is suspended to different degrees within specific national locations in order for it to be preserved globally through finance capital. International finance capital thus becomes the source of external discipline which is transmitted to the working class within specific national locations, through the forms of the prevention of communism. Through the movements of financial capital, absolute poverty and abstract labour are constantly re-created globally. Workers organise nationally only to find that the problem is international. Finance capital appears to be beyond the reach of working class action.

There is a sense in which social production has become increasingly "de-fetichised". To the extent that the law of value decays into bureaucratic administration social relations become more "transparent". Nationalisation, government subsidisation of industries inefficient from the standpoint of value, the welfare state, "full employment" etc indicate that the distribution of social labour can no longer be achieved through the law of value alone, but increasingly requires direct forms of social control. Thus, for example, the government intervenes in the "economy" to influence "demand", interest rates and inflation, to set up relatively permanent institutions of industrial arbitration, to adjust rents and to maintain or undermine "full" employment. With this intensification of direct forms of social control, however, it becomes clearer that it is people and not things which are the source of the problem. On the other hand, these non-value forms of control themselves are subordinate to value globally and function to preserve it. Social democracy and stalinism thus combine with finance capital to sustain the illusion of the eternity of the value form.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that much of the left has tended to present the forms of the prevention of communism as being transitional to communism. This is true not only of orthodox stalinist organisations but also of certain strands of trotskyism. For some of the latter: "The Soviet experience, despite its very specific character, was nevertheless a great laboratory for establishing the superiority of planning over the anarchic market economy of capitalism, and for learning from the gross mistakes and miscalculations perpetrated by the Stalinist bureaucracy" (Anonymous "Forward" to the New Park edition of Trotsky's *Towards Capitalism or Socialism*, 1978,p70). By presenting stalinism as being

with whatever critical reservations, an advance on capitalism, such statements only obstruct the movement towards communism. Worse still, when the working class begins to move against the social forms within which it has been partially contained, it finds itself being urged back into line by the self-proclaimed enemies of the existing order: not only by the social democrats and the stalinists but also by those who claim to have developed the revolutionary critique. Workers rejection of the forms of the prevention of communism is then taken as evidence of continued passivity in the face of bourgeois ideology. The active intervention of these organisations into the communist movement of the working class itself obstructs that movement.

Communism has thus become identified with the prevention of communism. Disillusionment with the prevention of communism takes the form of disillusionment with communism itself. This does not imply a simple ideological victory for value. Consciousness can be understood only in its relation to political economy and the political economy of the working class is conscious determination of needs. Having been forced to recognise needs, even if only formally and bureaucratically, capital cannot institute their derecognition when the need arises. While it has been possible, with the unwitting aid of the left, to discredit communism, it is impossible to discredit needs. The political economy of the working class has not been - and cannot be - dislodged.

Inherited Ideology and Practical Needs

Communism is not an ethical ideal to be realised by means of proletarian revolution. As the society of the freely associating producers, communism is a practical need and can emerge only out of the struggles of the workers themselves. Proletarian revolution is not one possible means amongst others by which to bring into being a desired end, but the necessary outcome of a real social process.

This process is the process of self-formation of the working class. Marx observed it at the moments of the (partial) victory of the political economy of the working class over the political economy of the bourgeoisie, and recognised it as a process tending towards communism. Since Marx, however, the intervention of the bourgeoisie into its own political economy has appeared to undermine the possibility of proletarian self-emancipation. The results of this intervention have been understood in terms of consciousness and ideology alone and thus the communist perspective has been lost.

If we are to retrieve this perspective we must re-found our analysis on the movement of the working class itself. The critique of social democracy and stalinism cannot be developed in terms of consciousness alone but must begin from the standpoint of working class needs. Our task is not to apportion blame but to re-found marxism on the basis of an analysis of class composition and class formation within the political economy of the epoch as a whole. Failing to do this, the left has been unable to free itself from the inherited ideology of working class passivity. Losing contact with the political economy of the working class, the left is reduced to making assertion about consciousness, which assertions must degenerate into sectarianism.

It is unfortunate that many of those who have stressed the reality of proletarian self-activity have done so in a rather crude fashion. This is true of certain strands of autonomism. Thus Cleaver, for example, sometimes - but not always - presents the struggle of the working class as a process without end (Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, Harvester, 1979). If, however, the working class can continue to transform the social forms of capital accumulation indefinitely, the struggle of the working class has no tendency towards communism. Failing to analyse the fate of the law of value under the impact of the self-formation of the proletariat, the critique of "leninism" and "leninism" itself become polar opposites which eternally reproduce each other.

The crucial thing is to recognise the problem. Included in this is the unbridgeable gap between the project outlined in *What Is To Be Done?* and the principle of proletarian self-emancipation which formed the bedrock of the International Working Men's Association. We must return to Marx. More importantly, however, we must return to the developing political economy of the working class. Crucially, we must examine the conditions which are the outcome of working class struggle but against which the working class is forced to struggle again, if we are to understand the full complexity and difficulty of the situation. To begin to characterise this complexity we can use the words of William Morris, bearing in mind the different context in which they were written and discounting their gender specificity, reflecting on " ... how men fight and lose the battle and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes about turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name" (*A Dream of John Ball*). But this, it should be stressed, can only be our starting point.

David Gorman

